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# TOKEFIELD PAPERS

*OLD AND NEW*

BY  
FRANK SWINNERTON



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## INTRODUCTION

### *LIFE AT SIXTY-FIVE*

A NUMBER of people have lately inquired for copies of *Tokefield Papers*; and the publisher of this new and enlarged edition has such a kindly feeling for the book that he suggests its revival. Otherwise, because of bombings in more than one quarter of England, the type and small remaining stocks of the original book had disappeared. So here is the mixed bag of chit-chat once again—with a difference. We have thought fit to leave out three papers, on 'Advice,' 'The Advantages of Disaster,' and 'Sentimentality,' and to replace them by some others. We have also added a preface to one of my novels (by kind permission of the Oxford University Press), and unambitious memorials of Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells, both of which appeared as obituaries in the London *Evening News*. These, although they belong to other genres, are as personal and conversational in tone as the homilies; and the result is an entirely Tokefieldian book of about twice the size of the first two editions.

Perhaps I should mention that the paper, 'Life at Forty,' was previously called 'What I Demand of Life.' It was written a quarter of a century ago, at the request of an American editor who admired the author's temperament; and it is now twenty-five years out of date. But, like the essay on 'Carmichaels,' it continues to amuse some of its readers, and it is retained. If newcomers and other interested persons will add to 'Life at Forty' what follows in Part Two ('A Farewell to Reviewing,' 'A Preface,' the memorials to Wells and

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Bennett, and 'What I Want My Daughter to Be') they will learn as much about the writer as they need suffer.

They will not learn what happens in my sub-conscious, because I have never had the modern habit of dredging hopefully for the suppressed self, and I cannot tell them. A psycho-analytical friend who has apparently dredged for me says I have an exceptionally subtle form of the inferiority complex; and if he speaks truth investigators, of whom, especially in the United States, a multitudinous school darkens discretion, may find the following facts helpful.

From an early age I was used to the thunderous knocks of debt- and rate-collectors—and to unopened front doors. 'Hush!' said I, hearing the knocks. They echoed louder and louder through my boyhood, a fantastic punctuation of threat. Presumably they impressed the unformed mind, which for a period of four or five years between the ages of eight and thirteen lived in a starved and very sick body. This body allowed me, when I was twelve, and largely unfed, to go occasionally to a small school, kept by a friend of my mother's, where I met and was asked home by the non-snobbish sons of builders, shop-keepers, and clerks; but I could never ask the other boys back, because in my home we had neither furniture nor the means to entertain them. At this school the boys wore a fine badged cap; and I remember being rebuked in a crowded shop by an officious stranger who accused me—a slum child—of masquerading in the discarded cap of a gentleboy. So conscious was I of our ignominious poverty that I could make no reply to this false charge but that of an indignant smile.

If, therefore, there is in fact any sense of inferiority in me it may be due to these and other unresented wounds of childhood. It certainly does not arise from a sense of personal inferiority, which I have never felt. It is true that I am modest and that I carry myself without self-importance; but then I learned when young to regard all men as my social equals

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and all forms of ostentation, whether social, intellectual, or—its most outrageous modern instance—aesthetic, as illbred.

That is why my writing, as for example in this least pretentious of books *Tokefeld Papers*, is as simple as I can make it. The simplicity has at times been misunderstood by those who are more readily intimidated into respect by an author's manner. It has seemed to them to be a mark of poverty, of inferiority. Hence the term 'competence,' with which reviewers too often damn my novels; hence, also, the description of myself (which I have twice seen in print) as in literature 'a conscientious mediocrity.' I do not like these epithets. I do not violently challenge them, because, knowing from long experience of the publishing trade how falsely authors assess their own value, I realize that they may, unfortunately, be true. But my conscientiousness is an acquired rather than an inborn trait. I am naturally a lazy idler, artful, evasive, and (according to H. G. Wells, who was no tortoise) exceptionally quick-witted. I think I could have been as unscrupulous an opportunist and self-advertiser as any man in the literary trade. It is not difficult to be a self-advertiser; and self-advertisement is often successful. One needs humour, contempt for others, the determination to get on, and a little talent. I have all these characteristics except the determination to get on. When I found, however, many years ago, that my employers, besides showing inexplicable affection for an obstinate but good-natured boy, also admired and trusted me, I responded with the instinct of decency felt by animals, human and otherwise, everywhere. Having no ambition to shine, and no love of work, I worked as well as I could—for the sake of pleasing others. The effect was startling. Properly exploited, it could have carried me to wealth, fame, and power.

The desire to please others (nowadays regarded as an absolute proof of third-rateness) spread, when from superabun-

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children, and if we clearly see what chaotic dangers impend, is for the happiness of those children. How, at sixty-five, could we have much concern for ourselves? Another five, or at most ten, years; and we shall be done with active concern with the dangers. But our children, whose sensitiveness the wiser do not underrate, can count on neither the stability of our past nor the oblivion of our happy future.

It is useless for the young recklessly to cry: 'Leave us alone!' That is the first intelligible cry of infancy. 'Don't hold me! I can do it! I don't want *your* help!' A natural cry; we remember in other circumstances uttering it ourselves. Our juniors, in their turn, will as they age regret and be as anxiously protective as we. To suppose that human nature changes is to ignore history.

That there are differences between life at the beginning of the twentieth century and life as it is now I do not dispute. Victorian belief in the ordered progress of civilization is as far as can be from the present wild acceptance of slogans. It is the distance between ethics and mass politics. And the arts have made a similar journey. One used to laugh at an Eastern king who, hearing the orchestra tuning its instruments, thought that noise the finest composition of all. One would not laugh now, in case one should be charged with ridiculing the latest musical sublimity. In our youth, the old described Brahms as obscure; Wagner and, later, Richard Strauss as cacophonous; Browning as a thinker; naturalism in fiction as a nasty new invention of the French. We found the old very stuffy and ridiculous, and said so under our breaths. To us, obscurity, cacophony, and naturalism were as meat and drink. They were new.

Now all is otherwise. To wars have been added, as influences on art and criticism, the tragic dogmas of Marx and Freud, the extraordinary rise in scientific education and in particular of mathematics, and the telescoping, into a quarter of a century, of complexities which would have rattled the

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assurance of wise and learned men who lived in the first two thousand years of conscious discovery. The air is packed with violent noise; explosions are common in every sphere; we are deafened, shaken, bewildered. And the political keyword, no more than a cry of unreality, of despair, is 'Security!'

What is the old man of 1949 to do? Hide his diminished head? Commit suicide? By no means. He rests on his life's experience. The spectacle of cataclysm, the roar and clatter of babel, if he has detachment enough, will give his mind plenty of activity. Unless he is half-dead he must be excited and stimulated by the time. But perhaps, in the arts, unless he is an intellectual or political leader, proud of his leadership (or an intellectual and political sheep, triumphant at being led), he may wish to rest and divert his mind. He may understand yet not long to join his younger contemporaries in their attempt to record in art what is less a revolution than a phantasmagoria of counter-revolutions. Mr. Bernard Shaw once admitted, as he grew old, to a waning interest in Wagner and increased delight in Rossini. Well, I, who once despised Mendelssohn, can now listen with calm pleasure to his Scotch and Italian symphonies, and cannot listen with patience to some admired modern composers, who seem to me to be either noisy bores or champion doodlers. Such reactions are not critical; they are instinctive. I see no merit in pretending to understand foreign languages which one has not learned. If the language is a private language the pretence would be even worse; it would be—would it not?—an insincerity.

This brings me to another consideration. Will the aged who are to preponderate in the future Britain insist upon art corresponding to their antediluvian habits of mind? Will they insist upon a return to Ruskin? We have had revivals of enthusiasm for Trollope, George Eliot, Henry James, and Arnold Bennett (with one, well advanced, for John Galsworthy); shall we have them for Mrs. Henry Wood, Rosa Nouchette Carey, and Emma Jane Worboise? As the

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wheels of intellectual and political fashion turn, idols of to-day fall, and, wearying of Marx and Freud we fall back for our philosophy upon Marcus Aurelius, Thomas À Kempis, and that 'Shakespeare of divines' Taylor?

Speaking for myself, the answer, unashamed, But then, being a novelist, I am chiefly interested in the individual. And, as I have said elsewhere, 'the born storyteller' continues to tell us what happened once upon a time to Brown, Jones, and Robinson, and to explain how it happened to them, and why, when all is said, human beings still rejoice less on account of political and economic conditions, less on account of repressions and complexes, than they do because they are fundamentally irrational, passionate, and egotistical. It is a modern cliché that unless one is all the time earnest, socially and politically active, and relentlessly engaged in changing the lives of others, one is being 'egoistic' and the word 'escapist' is thought to be as crushing a reproach as the words 'Red' and 'Reactionary.' But one is not escaping from anything, or trying to do so, when one relaxes, if one seeks refreshment, if one establishes contact with the thought and emotion of other ages or other peoples. Such contact is enrichment. When the word 'escape' is used, it is the merest label. So, as I listen comfortably to Schubert, as a composer, let us say Schubert, or read Jane Austen's novels for the thirtieth or fortieth time, or consort with Sherlock Holmes, Trent, or Hanaud, I have no sense of irresponsibility. I am having the courage to do what I like to see what I like, and read what I like.

I will go farther. I will say that those who claim to care for the first rate know nothing at all. They do not know what is first rate. They are being conventional. They have been taught at school and university that certain writers are to be admired and others shunned. Their judgment is conventional, not original. They have no standards by which

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what lies outside the types which they have been taught to admire. This teaching begins very early. Some time ago I was approached by four little girls of ten years old. They said: 'Could you tell us if *The Water Babies* is a classic?' I said I thought it might be so considered. The leader explained: 'Only we've got to give a list of our favourite books; and Miss Spangle says they must all be classics.' Favourites; but classics! At ten years old! Not one of the little girls had done more than dip doubtfully into *The Water Babies*; their favourites were *Dumpling: The Story of a Pony*; the Milly-Molly-Mandy books (which are of the finest order of books for children); and *First Term at St. Margaret's*; but Miss Spangle would have none of these. They were to be taught the myth of the first class.

I was never taught that myth. I sometimes think that with all the disadvantages of my uneducated state I enjoyed one great advantage, a complete freedom from the intellectual shepherding which ruins taste. I have, of course, read many extremely boring books because I thought they would do me good (such books as a prose translation of *Beowulf*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, and the novels of Aphra Behn); but I can read any book whatever with an open mind; and I have read far and wide in English literature with health and enjoyment. At present my favourite reading is to be found among the letters and poetry and criticism of the eighteenth century; nevertheless I have appointments with Hazlitt, C. S. Forester, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, Joyce Cary, Inspector French, and scores of others, many of them revisits, and all of them for refreshment but not solace.

Not solace. I have had a happy and well-occupied life. I have never needed anodynes, drink, or comforting. I have never needed flattery or more success than I have been lucky enough to enjoy. In fact I was blessed from birth with effervescent spirits, an almost total lack of concern with

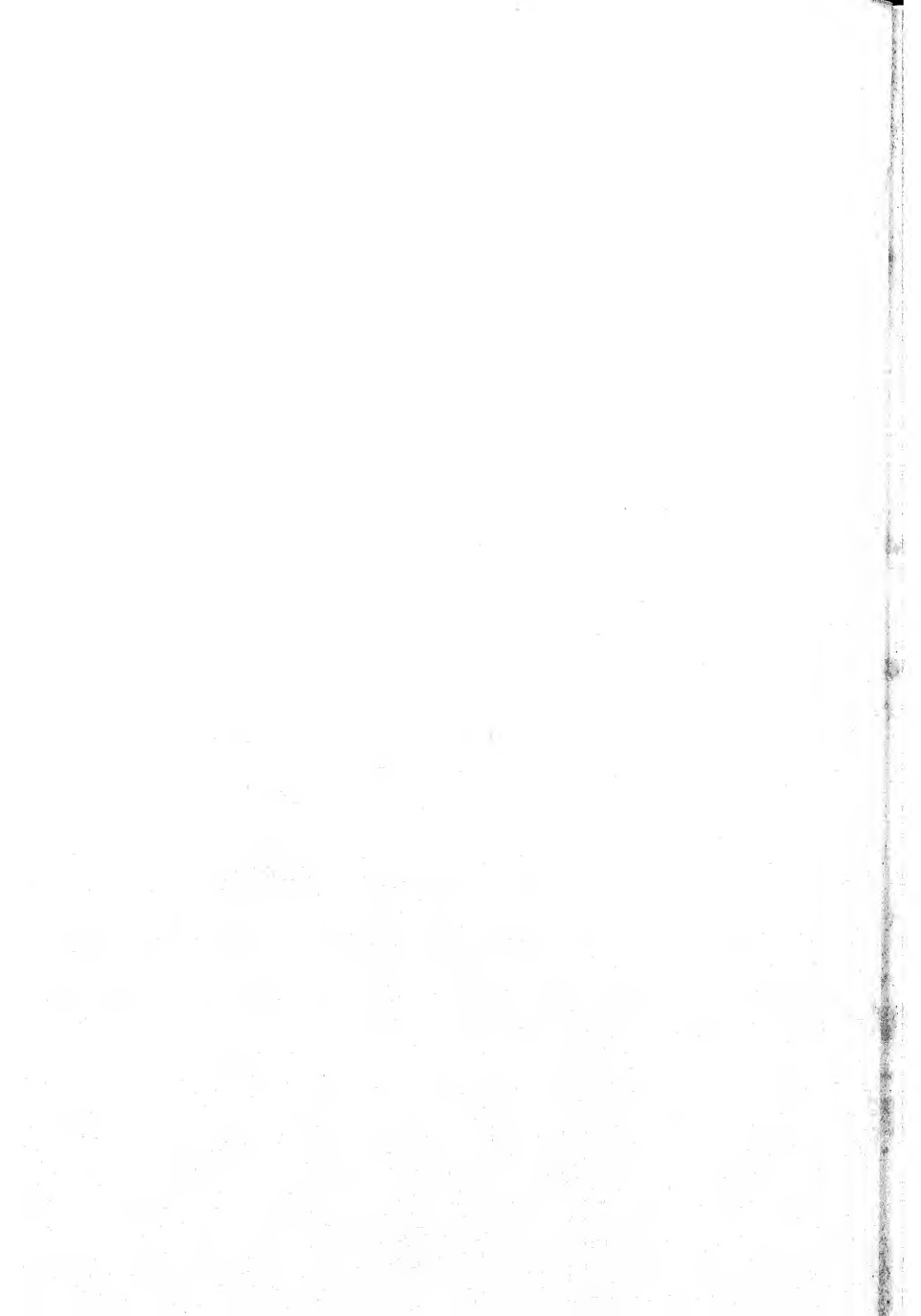


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myself, and a delicious, inexhaustible interest in other people. It is not, perhaps, an ardent interest; but it is cordial, and it has always enabled me to 'get on' with men and women in every walk of society. Give me now, at sixty-five, another ten years; and I shall write the six or seven books which I have always wanted to write. Give me the health and happiness of those I love. Let me have a little wine, some travel, the reading I plan, some good cricket to watch; and as far as I am concerned as an individual, I shall not complain.

That is not all I want. I want kindness and tolerance to pervade the earth. I want imaginative understanding to take the place of the dogmatic emotionalism which is spreading enmities everywhere. I want all men to be so sure of their equality with one another that they have not to persecute their fellows in order to demonstrate it. I want to end cruelty and revenge. I want to see the English spirit of decency and *noblesse oblige* spread to the five continents without backslidings on the part of Englishmen and their world fellows. I do not expect to see these joys before I die. But our generations represent such a speck in all time that I shall not despair at that. If it is asked what I do, or have done, to bring a state of divine peace into the world, I reply that nobody has been the worse for knowing me, or, I think, from reading my writings; and that I regard myself as the least of mortals.

# PART ONE



## CARMICHAELS

EVERY family has its Carmichaels. Most families have several of them. They are as universal as clever children. And yet as far as I know they have never been publicly named and classified until this moment. It was not I who first called the species 'Carmichael,' or observed the full enormity of the vast body of Carmichaels who infest the earth; but I have long gladly described Carmichaels as Carmichaels, and shall continue to do so. The word came into being in this way. Friends of mine who wished to talk with impunity before their children of what Dick Deadeye called 'a certain intimate relation' hit upon the alias of 'Mrs. Carmichael.' Having so named her, and having discussed between themselves various of Mrs. Carmichael's characteristics, they looked about the world, and found innumerable other Carmichaels dwelling in it. And, indeed, the explanation of 'Carmichaelism' being once made, we perceive ourselves to be completely surrounded by Carmichaels of the first order. They fill our homes, they fill our businesses, our streets, our omnibuses and shopping-stores, they owe us money, they distress us in all sorts of indescribable ways. Members of the inventors' family, making political speeches of 'progressive tendency,' have gone so far as to beg the nation not to let itself be 'Carmichaelled by the Government.' As for common life, one finds Carmichaels by the score in all varieties of circumstance, from the slum to the Cabinet, from the bench to the Bar, the forecastle to the Royal Academy, and beyond even the Royal Academy.

The first, and essential, feature of the Carmichael is the gift

of being pathetic. Cats and dogs can be Carmichaels. Cats that mope when they are left, and cause us to stay at home because they will miss us, are Carmichaels. Dogs that by their glee at the sight of our hats and walking-sticks make us take them inconveniently upon journeys which we would rather make alone are Carmichaels. Children who dissolve into tears at a hasty word, or who believe themselves to be misunderstood, or who cannot play by themselves, are Carmichaels. Older people whose feelings are easily wounded, who successfully wear a strained expression when we meet them after a short absence, during which we have written no letters, or when we part with them upon an excursion of pleasure to which they are not bidden, so that we are filled by the knowledge of their deprivation with shame and self-reproach, are Carmichaels. All parents whose sons and daughters dare not marry for fear of the gap they would leave at home are Carmichaels. Grandparents who show us that they feel rather neglected but that of course they are nobody at all, sniff, are Carmichaels. In fact, all those living creatures who make us feel absolutely and brutally selfish are Carmichaels.

Carmichaels may be meddlers and sensationalists. They may drink or suffer from paralysis or melancholia; but they are not Carmichaels in virtue of these habits or infirmities. They may lie, they may be hypocritical, they may feign illness—I knew one Carmichael who had an extraordinary gift for losing all control of her limbs in such an emergency, as the late George Grossmith is said to have done in the part of Ko-Ko; but these aspects of character in themselves are not *prima facie* evidence of Carmichaelism. They are what scientific people (especially weather experts) would call 'secondaries,' but the true Carmichael goes farther back than such manifest ailments and deceptions. The real Carmichaels can be known by their moral effects upon us, and by no other test. Nobody is a Carmichael unless he or she makes us feel inhumanly cruel and vilely selfish.

It must be realized that Carmichaels thrive and fatten upon the tender-hearted only. Really rugged egotists and bluff manly fellows with rude health and obtuse intellects are not conscious of them. It is the pedestrian who cannot escape the beggar, while his rich brother, the motorist, sails past unmolested. In the same way, only the sensitive can be Carmichaeled. But which of us is not sensitive in relation to those we love? Which of us in the Anglo-Saxon civilization, based as it is upon conscience and the opinion of others (these two terms being often interchangeable), cannot be Carmichaeled? Few indeed. Our hearts are easily lacerated. Shame, with us, is a potent force. We stand and deliver more readily to the appealing mother at the kerb than to the importunate hustler who looks strong enough to trounce us if we refuse his demand for alms.

I have heard of one Carmichael who called upon the hardest-hearted and most resolute of her daughters, protested against the behaviour of one of her grandchildren, and proceeded to deliver a lament upon the subject. Her daughter was obdurate, and made it clear that she did not think her son's deportment was any business of his grandmother's. The Carmichael became violently distressed at such cruelty to herself, and showed signs of fainting. The hard-hearted daughter remained unmoved. The Carmichael rose, staggered. . . . Still her daughter was inflexible. With pathetic dignity the Carmichael proposed, as her counsels were not needed, to leave the house for ever. She was not begged to remain. She left the house, but as soon as she was beyond the front door the horror of the scene in which she had just played a part had such an effect upon her that she sank weakly to the doorstep, and lost consciousness. Her brutal daughter, witnessing the scene through the coloured glass which formed the upper half of the front door, and dissembling her tremors, opened the door. A faint groan came from the Carmichael, who lay otherwise perfectly still, with her eyes closed. 'Go,'

said the callous daughter loudly to her ill-mannered son. 'Go and get a pail of water. That is the best thing for people who have fainted. Go and get a pail of water. We'll throw it over her.' And with that the daughter and her son retired to the house. When they returned in two minutes' time, with such a pail of restorative water as had been threatened, the fainting Carmichael had disappeared.

But not all of this Carmichael's daughters are so cruel. The others are of gentler disposition. With them the conviction of sin (for, after all, this wicked daughter of whom I have told the above true story had been married very young and had been subjected to the mental debauchery of a stern and methodical husband, a Civil Servant) was constant. The second, it is true, married; but for years was harrowed by weekly visits from her mother and by subjection to her own sympathetic dread of giving pain. As for the third, the youngest, marriage for her was out of the question. She was a pretty and intelligent and healthy girl; and in the course of a number of years she could have married any one of several agreeable young men who sought her company. But the thought of what the loss of her would mean to a delicate and sensitive elderly lady, whose heart became unmanageable at any suggestion that she might be left alone with her husband, deprived of a daughter's care, kept this girl single. She had in full measure the sense of wickedness which Carmichaels create in those they love. Desiring another kind of life than the one she led at home, she knew that in even conceiving such desire she was revealed as selfish to the core. Not only that. It was clear to this girl that if she married—even though it be for love, and to sacrifice herself to a husband—the knowledge of her mother's suffering would spoil any happiness the marriage might bring. Accordingly, she remained unmarried, cherishing the Carmichael, and struggling to quell the eagerness for other life which from time to time the Devil aroused in her heart. Until one evening this abandoned girl

lost all sense of propriety. At the age of twenty-eight or twenty-nine she suddenly and hysterically fled from her parents' house. The Devil had won. But she had been Carmichaelled for so many years that she arrived at the home of one of her sisters in a state of incoherence and collapse. She was ill. She was oppressed with all the consciousness of guilt which we suppose a murderess to feel.

Nevertheless, she had escaped. She had broken the bonds of Carmichaelism. She never returned to her old home. For weeks conscience struggled in her breast with selfishness, and selfishness won. She took a situation, she found her mind and nature growing and flowering, she at length married, she achieved happiness. Nobody, seeing her now the loving and devoted wife of a poor man and the absorbed mother of a small and delightful family, could realize the wickedness of her selfish flight. The Carmichael, deserted, was a piteous figure. She had never been so ill, so pathetic, so bereft of love. All the illnesses of a medical dictionary attacked her simultaneously, and her husband would really have called in the doctor if she had not assured him that she was past all medical aid. But she is still alive, ten years after her bereavement, and her Carmichaeling talents are being surreptitiously exercised upon a younger generation.

The best of people have at times a touch of the Carmichael in them; and I must not be thought unmindful of the mother or father who genuinely suffers from the loss of a loved child. If we are forsaken, or dread that we may be forgotten, we do—all of us—strive to make ourselves more interesting to the beloved. For the time we are sick persons engrossed in our own ego. A cat will pluck the sleeve of one who plays with a puppy, a dog will lick a hand and whine for unaccorded notice, a child will make an appeal—in face of the admired exhibition of a younger child—which only a hard heart could ignore. How much more, then, a grown-up person, one who has a thousand endangered links with her child, and one



who has proved the short memory and heedlessness of other humans, may feel a ghastly sense of loneliness or of being ignored! It is a disloyalty, a failure of confidence in the beloved, but how natural! It is only human—it is only canine and feline—to feel slight jealousy—jealousy that is no jealousy of an individual, no basely motivated hostility, although it arises from perhaps a similar cause. The cause of all jealousy is the feeling of powerlessness or inferiority. As jealousy arises when somebody does something that we should like to be able to do, and suspect ourselves of being unable to do, so this fear comes from conviction that love for ourselves is incompatible with love for the highly superior being who has won our darling's heart. We touch her sleeve, as does the cat; we do whatever is the human equivalent for licking his hand as the dog does; we strive to remind him or her of our existence, our claim to love, to attention. We soften our tone, as lovers grow gentle. Having gained momentary notice, we expatiate upon our own doings and our own helplessness. Ever so little, we yield to the temptation to appeal for sympathy. We do not beg—no! A wistful note, a glance, a pressure—so slight as hardly to wound our self-esteem—and the pathetic approach is made. Pity is what we crave. Pity—it is Carmichaelism, to be controlled! The poison is working in our systems. It is natural; it is pathetic; but we ought not to ask for pity. What we want is love, freely given. If we cannot keep it by fair means, let us not seek to keep it by foul! There is the world of difference between love and pity, for all that the poet said; and if we are wise and proud we shall be silent for the sake of the loved one's happiness rather than noisy and appealing for the sake of our own. What if he or she does forget us for a time? Will the tide of love not return? Then let our dearest ones come back to us as freely as they go, to love and understanding and not to the reproach of loneliness and neglect. For us the duty is clear. It is to hold our heads high.

Death to the Carmichaelistic tendencies of our fainting hearts!

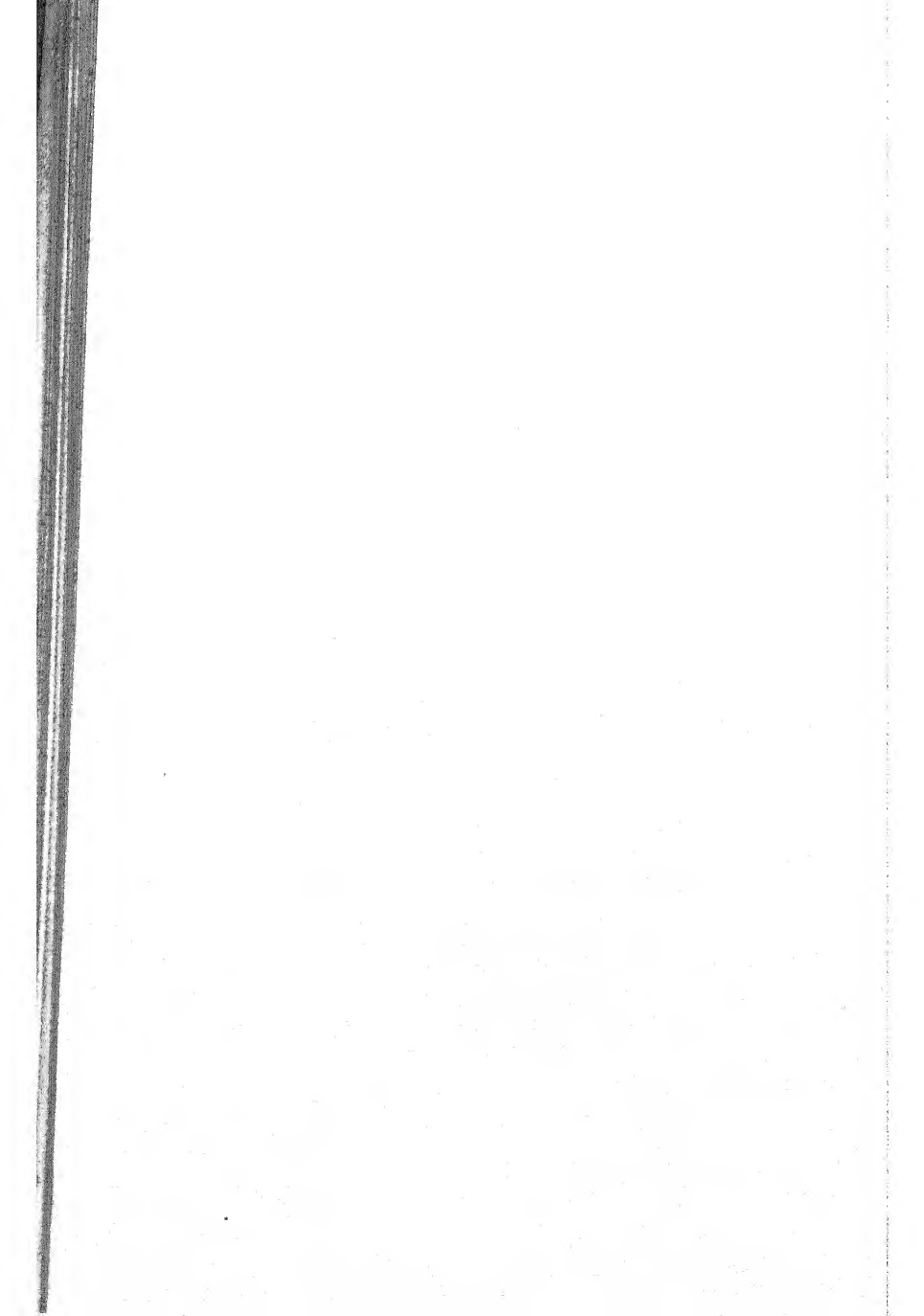
Often, of two friends, or of two who marry, there is one who begins thus, through some weakness or inferiority of character or strangling tenacity of affection, to exercise unscrupulous or unconscious power. In each case the battle is between weakness upon the one hand, making claims, and pity upon the other, yielding ever, and through love permitting a tyranny to arise. Who has not seen a young wife or a young husband 'giving in,' because 'it means so much' to the other member of the partnership? A petulant husband, or a sulky one, who does not like his wife to dance with other men, so that she eventually stays at home and gives up dancing altogether. Or a husband who forsakes his friends because his wife must not be left alone, because she is tired in the evening, and so pathetically needs to be petted. Beware! Carmichael is awake! Carmichael is busy! With such a beginning, the end is only a question of time. A husband who grows ill-used, a wife whose mouth puckers—into whose eyes tears start. . . . Carmichael is very near. Tears are always ready to fill the Carmichael's eyes. Tears must be watched. They are a danger-signal. So must objectless staring upon the part of a male Carmichael, a fondness for the solitary bottle, sighs, any sudden fierce caress, or indisposition for caress. Headaches. Shrinking from society. . . .

For Carmichael is not only to be found within almost every home, in the affairs of fathers and mothers of advanced age, or of aunts and uncles, and such like human impedimenta. Once measure and judgment in affection are tinged with pity, and the pity is accepted, Carmichael has his clutch upon the household. Pity accepted is pity exploited. Carmichael is in possession. Thereafter the kind and gentle will be Carmichaelled (there is no other word to suggest a tyranny of supplication) to death. Carmichaelism grows before our eyes. It is contagious. I have known families where the husband

and father has been Carmichaeled by his children until he has given them mildly and amiably the whole of his care and energy, and has kept nothing for himself. He has fed them by pecking his own breast, as does that celebrated bird the name of which I have forgotten. We all know wives and mothers who have reared Carmichaels in this way. We have watched them yielding to the greedy, to the over-demonstratively affectionate, the tragically misunderstood, in exactly this way. They do it, some of them, because their own youth has been hard, or because they are silly and pleased with demonstrative affection, without counting how much of their own life is appropriated by youthful Carmichaels. I have been told of one mother who once murmured over her Carmichael, 'She's such a little tragedy queen!' The Carmichael was young then. She is now old. She is at this moment more sorry for herself, more the recipient of pity and the flowers of pity, than anybody I ever met. She weeps readily. She groans. She is constantly afflicted with faintness and sickness if those at hand should appear disposed to thwart her. And she is as tough as leather. She is a true parasite. In a word, she is a Carmichael.

And there is this to be said. Every community has the Carmichaels it deserves. Carmichaels are born, but they can be subdued. Their inclination to Carmichael their own families can be repressed. It only needs alertness to the danger. But those of us who first yield to the impulse of pity, who are hampered and shackled and paralysed by the pathos of the incipient Carmichael, have a grave responsibility to mankind. We are the ones who deserve blame, because it is our tenderness that enables the Carmichael to flourish. We cannot bring ourselves to say 'No!' although we know that we ought to refuse. We yield, and the consequences are such as to create terror in the observer. We are made the prey of weakness greater than our own—weakness that is a malignant growth. The doctrine of pity is a beautiful one (if by 'pity' we mean 'mercy'), but pity as it is involuntarily practised by most

unselfish people is more than the sacrifice of a momentary impulse. It is a betrayal of life to the Carmichaels. It is nothing less than moral ruin to them and to ourselves. For Carmichaels live upon the tenderness of others, as slugs live upon the most tender shoots in the garden. Carmichaelism is an instinctive thing, like the turning of a flower's face to the sun. The Carmichael could not imagine himself or herself to be a parasite, although hypochondria (the power to be miserable about one's own misery) is not unknown to Carmichaels. Carmichaels are not bullies or conscious hypocrites. They are possessors of the unique gift, which gives them their power, of making us feel remorseful, hideously selfish, hard, brutal, callous, thoughtless, and disgusting. They are like those aunts who sit in pain while a cheerful boy, at first noisy and full of life, is frowned into abashed silence. They are the cuckoos in the hedge-sparrow's nest. They are the moral invalids of our day. They are death and destruction to our peace of mind. They have no life without us; their tyranny is inscrutable and incessant; and they strangle our happiness and vitality as surely as any convolvulus strangles the self-supporting flower around which it subtly entwines itself. Woe to the Carmichaels! They are the enemies of the good.



## TREATS

SOME people are hard to please, or they are supposed to be hard to please; but for most of us great pleasure is to be obtained by the most trivial of things. If we were able to ask each other, point blank: 'What would be the greatest treat you could have at this moment?' the replies would be astounding. They would also illumine human nature. I believe that no single reply would demand a fortune, diamonds, a yacht, or a throne. All would be for some small, easily-attainable thing. And not only is it the essence of a treat that it should be something small; but lavish gifts are not even desired by those of us whose chief interest lies in gratitude for loving thought. We should hear, in reply to our question, even if we have doubted the silences of our friends, some very reassuring confessions as to their most immediate desires.

So much for the general theory of treats and for our own requirements of a treat. How strange it is that in seeking to *give* treats, on the other hand, we should so often make the mistake of painting the lily! It is as though we supposed all other persons to have vulgar tastes in pleasure. We do not take enough interest in these others to ascertain what their real wishes are likely to be. So we plunge towards expense. Instead of giving loving thought to our 'surprises,' we substitute an air of extravagance which is to make our gift appear costly. We order a huge bouquet, ignoring wistful glances at a bunch of violets. We give a sumptuous banquet, which few people enjoy, when bread and cheese or toasted chestnuts

by the fireside in a cosy room make for intimacy and comfort. We donate large, handsome, inhuman dolls, which close their eyes and talk, when all the world knows that Jemima Ragbag is the indispensable toy. And, by behaving in this eccentric way, we are all the time showing that we do not understand what constitutes a treat, and we are conspicuously and ignominiously failing to provide treats.

Is it any wonder that Gilbert Chesterton once said that the present age, being greedy and pleasure-mad, had lost the sense of treats? It is no wonder at all. Chesterton's own idea of a treat was probably something like having his dinner on the floor; and this is a good enough treat, if one fancies it. It is much better, I am sure, than having tea out of doors, which for me is no treat at all. And yet there are many to whom having tea out of doors is a lovely treat. Spiders, caterpillars, and other acute discomforts do not daunt such as these. Awkward chairs, unruly crumbs, and a plague of gnats, with triumphant wasps to conclude, do nothing to dismay the tea-out-of-doors fanatics. They have the sense of a treat; and it is enough.

The most uncomfortable tea I ever had was in a luxurious home where everything, from the urn to the bread-and-butter plates, was made of solid silver. There was no treat in this, since one could not exploit the quality of one's plate by throwing it about the room. For all the advantage which silver gave, therefore, in its unbreakableness, was to be seen a disadvantage, in its weight and the consequent solemnity of the party. I could not help thinking at the time what a treat it would be to be among friends, even though saucers and cups, marked with the names of different hotels or railways, did not match, and even though, having been bought piece-meal at the local market, they were thick, chipped, and discoloured. No treat was to be found in silver. I doubt if a treat is ever to be found there.

## TREATS

When every blessed thing you hold  
Is made of silver or of gold,  
You long for simple pewter.

Was Chesterton right in thinking—in effect—that this is an age of silver; and that the present generation has lost its sense of treats? No. He was wrong. Or only partially right, for the reason that I have given earlier, which is that our sense of treats for ourselves remains, but that our sense of what is a treat for others has become vulgarized. Chesterton, if believed literally, would be supposed to mean that nothing was any longer a treat to any of us. This we can all refute. You can refute it, and I can refute it. We know very well what a treat is. It is something small, which gives pleasure by its unexpectedness, or because it is outside the usual range of our activities. It may take the form of hard work, or the receipt of an unaccustomed privilege. It may be a good deed or a deed that is not quite so good. There are some to whom dirty hands are a treat, and some to whom perfect cleanliness is a treat; some to whom rest is a treat, and some to whom violent physical activity is a treat. In fact, so long as it is unusual, almost anything may constitute a treat; and we shall not know what is a treat for others unless we love them, and take the trouble to understand their strongest, but suppressed, inclinations.

There was a story told recently of a little girl, who, visiting an aunt, showed signs of great boredom. When questioned as to what she would like above all things to do, this little girl answered that she would like to give her doll's clothes a *real* wash, with *hot* water. Pretence, too often indulged, had suddenly staled. Nothing would now answer but reality, with real soap, real lather, and perhaps a little—not allowed at home—splashing over the edge of the bath-tub. For this child suds were a treat. A little girl I know has a passion for helping to wash-up dishes. She travels with a serviceable overall in order that she may assist in this task in all houses which she



visits. Yet to most housewives washing-up is the unforgivable affront. To this little girl washing-up is a treat. In fact, it is not compulsory. It is also a pastime in which she can feel herself to be useful. That feeling of usefulness to some of us, alas! is still a treat, and those who would give treats should not exclude it from consideration as a factor in great pleasure.

For myself, although I find that many things, from rides in automobiles to visits to the theatre, are no longer treats, the receipt of an old book is still an inexpressible treat. Not a new book, but an old one—almost any old one, providing it is small and a classic. But I rarely receive such a treat. I am given handsome new books, which I do not care for. In olden days my greatest treat was to be taken for a ride, either in Paris or in London, upon the front seat of a horse-omnibus or tramcar. Such rides are my earliest recollection. They remain in memory as the epitome of happiness. Nor is this kind of treat altogether removed nowadays. The horses are gone, it is true, with their rhythmical hoof-beats, and the gentle swaying which they imparted to the vehicle, but even an electric tramcar or a motor-omnibus can raise me at this time to a state of absorbed contemplation such as no smaller and more plastic automobile can achieve. An almost completely windless summer day, with white flannel-clad cricketers at play upon the common, is a perfect treat for me. So is a day spent upon a sailing yacht. Aboard a yacht one can experience some of the great glories of sensation of which human beings are capable. The sight of blue sky and running water, sun glittering upon brasswork and the exquisite lines of the deck; the sense of easy and unfettered motion, of remoteness, buoyancy, and adventure; the complete shedding of all feeling of responsibility for one's course, one's own safety and the safety of others—these are only a few of the splendours of yachting. And as, for me, yachting is an experience enjoyed only once in two or three years, it is a treat still, and will always be a treat.

It is a treat to me to hear the skylark. It is a treat to be demonstratively recognized by a little dog that I have not seen for some time. It is a treat to walk upon the Sussex or the Wiltshire downs, or to stand overlooking the Sussex Weald. It is a treat to read a witty book, or to remember all the happy times I have had in the course of a somewhat chequered life. It is a treat to drink good Burgundy, to hear the little newsboys at Boulogne crying 'Deely Meel,' to be in any train that starts punctually or that (this is a super-treat) arrives, at the end of a long journey, to the appointed minute. Finally, as I do not think it desirable, or even possible, to catalogue all the events and occasions which supply me with treats, it is the most inexpressible treat of all (to myself) to be completely idle.

Friends of mine do not know how to be idle. One of my closest friends is incapable of idleness. It could never be a treat to him. It could only be a bore. And when I think of this friend, who is a man of much experience and demoralizing mental efficiency, I am aware that it would be very difficult to devise for him an event which would be a treat. Difficult, but not impossible. Difficult, because he has at command at all times many of the things which to myself are treats; but, in spite of everything, not impossible. Indeed, while some of my above-listed treats would be nothing to my friend, one or two of them, I am convinced, would make his eyes sparkle. But in making that list I was not aiming at a universal list of treats. Many of the happenings which I can command, and which, owing to their commonness, have ceased to be treats for me, are still capable of providing treats for others.

It is not, then, that there are fewer treats in the world than there used to be. There are more. It is not that the majority of human beings are less susceptible to treats than they used to be. Quite otherwise. But it is very true indeed that the feverish pursuit of pleasure for its own sake does cheapen and render unavailing many of the simple delights which used to be regarded in older days as treats. A dance or

a theatre is no treat to many young people of the present day. Impossible for them to have the sudden shock of a promise, the days of anticipation, the almost painful delight of the evening's fulfilment. They are the losers of much happiness in this way. An automobile, nowadays, is no treat to quite a large proportion of our younglings. Trips and distances are trivialities to most of them. Consequently there are more bored young people in the world to-day than there have ever been. That is true, and it is to be regretted. But boredom is due, not to satiety, not to the rush and worry after pleasurable excitement, as Chesterton imagined, but to fundamental defect of character. It is a personal, and not a group defect. Those who hustle after pleasure do so because they have nothing whatever within themselves which is amusing. They would be just as bored as they are now if they had not been overdosed with treats. Nothing would make those who are naturally bored develop into anything different, because one is never bored with external things—always with oneself. 'A mind lively and at ease,' says Jane Austen, 'can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer.'

A mind diseased from boredom, Miss Austen might have added, is naturally insensible of treats. As Miss Austen lived before the days of boredom I will add the words for her. Also I will add that I do not recommend giving treats to the bored. I would keep treats for those who can appreciate them. The bored, it is true, will grab and vulgarize all they can; but they cannot spoil the delights of the simple-hearted, because they can never tell what these are. If they could discover such joys they would not want them. They would waste no time upon the song of the skylark or a scene of natural beauty. They may, certainly, through stupidity spoil the scene by building their beastly houses upon it, and they may in the same manner drive the skylarks farther afield; but these possibilities do not come within the scope of an essay upon 'Treats.' On the contrary. It is against the whole spirit of the

bored, and the encroachments of the bored, that we must set our faces if we are to preserve untarnished our sense of treats. And the first thing we must do is to restore the treat to the position from which, as Chesterton warned us, it is slipping.

How is this to be done? By combating and curing the disease of boredom in its earliest stages? That is one way. I occasionally see—but I do not personally know—a very disagreeable little boy, whose face is already set in disdain, as it will be to the end of his days. He wants everything his own way. He has a tiny bicycle, a barrow, bats, balls, a hundred other toys; and his sole use for these things is to flash them before the eyes of less fortunate children. In all other relation to his toys he is weary and dissatisfied, because—because, poor and horrid little boy, nobody likes him or takes any interest in him. Nobody gives him treats. Instead, he is given presents. Is my point clear? Presents are the reverse of treats. Presents stand for the expenditure of money, rather than of love. This little boy is heaped up with presents; but he does not know what a treat is. He never will know. He is condemned to presents, selfishness, and boredom.

That brings me to my moral, which is this. If fathers and mothers love their children, and are interested in them, the children are never bored and they continue all their lives to appreciate treats. If fathers and mothers are not interested in their children, the children are interested in nothing. They are bored from the beginnings of their lives. They catch the boredom of their parents from the cradle. They do not understand treats; they do not understand gifts or toys or enjoyments. They are bored. They grow up bored, and they rush after excitement because they are bored. Whereas children who are loved, and whose fathers and mothers take such interest in them as most lovingly to give them treats instead of presents, grow up almost immune from boredom. They can see nothing that does not answer, because they have

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minds lively and at ease. It is vital to the race that children should have loving parents, who will teach them by example to be unselfish and to take delight in small things. Every parent, therefore, who is about to give a present to his or her child should pause, and substitute a treat. Treats last longer than presents. They last for ever.

## WHY GARDENERS ARE GLOOMY

It has frequently been noticed that, although gardens are often very beautiful places, gardeners as a class are depressed. Three young gardeners were once standing talking at Reigate, Surrey, upon a large open space. They saw approaching from the distance, accompanied by his wife and children, the most dismal-looking man they had ever seen. 'Look at this faller,' said one of the three. 'Oi betcher whatcher biker he's a ga-ardiner!' He was right; the most dismal of men was in fact a gardener. He was head-gardener at a large house in that neighbourhood, and his face was seamed with cares. This story is a true one, narrated to me by one of the three; and it has its plain moral.

Gardeners notoriously cry for rain when the rest of men long for sunshine. If one remarks cheerfully to gardeners: 'How nice the roses look to-day,' they shake their heads, and crush one by saying miserably: 'Ain't what they *should* be. Them plagued floi; them cuckoo-spit . . . Blessed mildew. . . .' Too well do gardeners realize the truth. Closer examination by the amateur does indeed reveal both fly and mildew, and a small sinister patch of white froth. The froth conceals a lethargic yellow insect which presently will jump headlong about the garden like a grasshopper or the Death Watch beetle.

Once started upon wretched thoughts, the gardener can but add to one's dolours. 'Carrots won't come to nothin',' says he. 'Nor turnips: they've got the fly' or 'the beetle.' There's thrip on the peas; woolly aphids on the apples' (but

in England he will not say 'woolly aphid,' but 'American blight,' while in America I think he says 'Irish blight'). 'Me lettuce is boltin''; 'Sha-an't 'ave no anemones—not the "Cayenne" (Caen); them there wireworms has been a-after them.' 'Blessed slugs. . . .' And so on.

Very quickly does the amateur discover that his or her easy satisfaction with the superficial appearance of a garden rests entirely upon ignorance. It is all very well for Francis Bacon, in his essay, 'Of Gardens,' to lay out thirty acres of what he calls 'prince-like' garden, with divisions into three parts, of which no fewer than twelve are to go to the main garden and the rest to 'green' and 'heath.' In his day, if we are to judge by report and by his omission of all reference to pests, a garden could be 'the purest of human pleasures,' and so without blemish or anguish to the gardener. But nowadays matters are different. A garden is a field of incessant battle—a siege warfare—in which man is always at a disadvantage. As amateurs we may still stroll in the gardens of friends with a sweet unconsciousness of rust, deformity, and the innumerable woes of failure and disease; but if we are in ever so slight a degree professionals—if we have, that is, gardens of our own—we shall find ourselves gradually, as other gardeners are—weighed down by the strain of incessant struggle with the elements and the ills which affect every kind of crop. Then we shall understand why gardeners are gloomy. They are gloomy because their minds are concerned less with blooms and verdure than with disease, decay, insects, birds, weeds, and even with blank spaces which ought to be smiling with brilliance. They are gloomy because they know what the garden *ought to look like*.

I will not dwell upon the coloured lures of seedsmen's catalogues, or the strange, wicked photographs which one sees of whole fields crammed with perfect flowers. These are but the flares shown to poor mariners by malignant wreckers. We 'follow the gleam' year after year, and dash upon disas-

trous rocks very much as deceived mariners must have done. Nothing will cure us of that trustingness. After all, seeds must come from somewhere, and I take it that one seedsman's packets contain seeds not greatly unlike those in the packets of another seedsman.

Moreover, there is an unpromising gaudiness in some of the drawings. It threatens vulgarity, and blowsiness. Only the really professional gardener, who longs for all his blooms to be insufferable giants of disgustingly crude colour, will aim at such results as the packets promise. The rest of us will be content with something smaller. Besides, we have lost some of our faith in the packet picture, and we take what we can get. We *must* buy seeds, or obtain them gratuitously from other gardeners; and seeds are seeds all the world over. It is what happens to the seeds when planted in our own gardens that makes gardeners like ourselves the most despondent of human beings.

For a thousand ills may attend a seed. It may rot where it lies. That is the most likely event. The wet and the cold may destroy it. Or it may swell and burst, and wireworm or the grub of the leather jacket may nestle to the roots and consume them. Or, with good fortune, the plant may show its first green shoots, and they may be eaten by somnolent slugs. An inch or two more, and a caterpillar of voracious type may nip them off close to the surface of the earth. Sometimes they may catch the eye of a dear little bird, and yield themselves as succulent morsels to him.

If they escape these early ills (and wireworm and grub may set to work at any time), frost may destroy; fly may settle and consume; damp and cold may so weaken the plant that it cannot resist the spreading plagues of the garden. Its leaves may curl and shrivel, may stain, may drop off. Its flower may never come; or, if it comes, may be but half a flower—a wretched caricature, not only of the seedsman's jubilant representation, but even of what one sees actually blooming



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in other gardens. And when it grows tall and strong, a shelled snail will climb its height, or a shrieking wind may rise suddenly, and blow it flat. Misshapen, discoloured, slain in the darkness by summer frost, or by boisterous wind, the flower is a single item in the daymare of the gardener. Each single flower is but a detail, for in a garden no more than an acre in extent there must be well upwards of a million of such delicate lives. All of them in danger; all at death's door.

There is drought to consider—when the earth cannot be dug; when the flowers and the vegetables parch; when lawns crack, and banks, through the pitiless glare of the sun, indulge in paralysing land-slides. Watch the flowers wilting; see the young cabbages turning yellow, and the young rows of peas drying a dull brown. 'Lovely summer weather!' laughs the amateur, stretching easily in bed, and feeling exhilarated by the blue sky. 'Makes you feel good to be alive.' 'If it don't rain *soon*,' mutters the gardener, 'all my young cauliflowers will go. The beans ain't settin'. All of them violas—they ain't nothin' but water—will die.'

A terribly grim expression appears upon his face. Even though the Water Board may recommend economy with water, he steals out secretly in the evening, snaffles his hose-pipe on to the scullery tap, and sprays the dying garden. And, while he does this in desperation, he knows that water from the tap is only a wetness; it has not the nourishing properties of rain. It may choke the plants, instead of doing them good. 'Plaguèd noosance, these beamy days,' grumbles the gardener. 'All my young pla-ants a-goin'. And I'm doin' more 'arm than good be waterin'.' I have a theory that if one waters one's pet plants the mere moisture draws to the spot innumerable underground consumers, so that watering in patches is plant-murder.

And now comes another threat. Sir Jagadis Bose says that we ourselves, if the plants do not like us, may cause them

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such a trembling of agitation as to induce nervous breakdown. If we go near the plants—though we tread quietly—they are aware of it; they faint from dislike of us. Their hearts sink; their strength goes. And this not due, I understand, to the presence in our hands of knives or scissors; it does not arise from dread of losing a favourite bloom (after all, one has one's hair cut without pain, if the barber is competent, and I suppose that losing a bloom is no more terrible than having one's hair cut), but from sheer temperamental dissonance. What is to be done? For it must be realized that the distaste may be created not only by one's self; it may arise at the approach of one's gardener, or one's guests. We must in future take the greatest care not to allow guests to upset our flowers. As for our gardeners—that is too painful a theme to discuss. All the same, a good gardener must be one who is upon good terms with his plants. When the new gardener comes, we must watch to see whether the flowers 'take' to him. Otherwise our main garden may degenerate into Bacon's 'Heath,' or even into a desert.

Another cause of gloom to gardeners is frequently the mistress of the house. I remember one mistress who told me her gardener looked like an assassin. She was sure that one day he would kill her. At the time I was sympathetic, as I thought that, since the garden was hers, she ought to be allowed to do as she wished in it. I have learned better. The mistress of the house is often the bane of the gardener's days. If he manages to hold up his head among all the invalids, he may still be driven to frenzy by the mistress of the house. A gardener once confided to me: 'You see, sir, the ladies is like chicken: they're always after something *fresh*.'

It is too true. They want hothouse flowers to be grown in herbaceous borders. They see flowers at exhibitions, or in other gardens, and covet them. They grow tired of seeing a flower bed planted with geraniums ('showy blooms') or begonias. 'Can't we have something different here, Grubbe?

I'm so sick of these things.' These things! which he has laboured months earlier to produce! 'Yes, madam,' says Grubble, wounded to death. . . .

Mistresses of the house also often develop strange likings and dislikings; and these can with difficulty be endured, although they call for philosophy, bitten lips, clenched earthy fists. But what no gardener in the world can bear is to find a flower, or a marrow, or a plant, which he has been carefully tending, and bringing to perfection, suddenly and sportively cut, carried to the kitchen, given away. . . . 'Oh, Grubble,' says the lady of the house; 'I want strawberries this evening.' 'Beg pardon, madam,' begins the gardener. 'You bin and picked them all. There ain't enough for a dish.' 'Nonsense!' The lady is peremptory. Shaking his head, perhaps murmuring, Grubble retires. The few strawberries which come to table are pale. They are small. They are sharp to the tongue. 'Really, Grubble's getting unbearable!' says the mistress of the house. 'And these *strawberries!*' To her friends: 'Grubble simply cannot *grow* strawberries! I don't know why it is!' 'Ah,' say the friends, 'our Clacker is the man for strawberries. We always have beauties. . . .' 'I *know*,' says the mistress of the house. Poor Grubble! Having survived all the stress of pests and horrors, he is crushed from above. 'Like chicken, they are. Never satisfied. . . .' Sometimes I think gardeners are inevitably misogynists.

They also feel a hopeless animosity against birds. A robin—yes. Gardeners love robins. They do not vehemently dislike thrushes or even—for most of the year—starlings. I have known gardeners listen appreciatively to the lovely, thoughtful song of the blackbird. But when the blackbird gives his single, throaty, fruit-marauding note (it is 'chug-chug,' or something like that), the faces of gardeners grow hideous with passion. For they know that everything which has not been netted is in danger. A madness seizes them. In the effort to save the five remaining plums which the maggots

have spared, they will throw stones, their caps, nay, spades, at the laughing blackbird.

He will be momentarily defeated. And it is for something called 'sparrows' or 'them plagued sparrows' that gardeners keep their most vehement hatred. These little brown birds, which at times, for want of something worse to do, hop upon the rose beds and rose bushes, eating green fly, do not keep to green fly. They will go for green peas (as will the charming-looking tomtits), and they will go for seeds. I have known one gardener who does not prepare his seed beds, but, after sowing, throws down great clods upon what he has sown. He claims in this way to get better results, because he says: 'If you puts down sifted earth, they sparrows knows. They knows there's seeds there. They says: "Come on, boys: all ready for us!" and they just sets to, and eats 'em up!' I have never seen the results of his attempt to outwit the sparrows; but he is a morose fellow, who talks to himself as he looks for signs of scab and bleeding and the codlin moth.

It is a marvel to me that anything in the garden survives at all. I have caught and condemned thousands of slugs; I have walked about with a huge tank upon my shoulders, spraying roses and lilies which were swarming with green fly; I have permitted the use of pieces of broken mirror as bird-scares; I have chased dozens of dogs and geese from the garden; I have seen little asters laid low in a night, and hunted for caterpillar, wireworm, and the like; and as fast as I have seemed to deal with one pest another has taken its place. If the weather is not too dry it is too wet. Frost on summer nights seems to be quite common. Lupins shed their blooms, and giant poppies allow their roots to degenerate into pulp. Annuals, so called 'hardy', have perished in their seed boxes. A much appreciated pear tree this year had—for the first time—a fine crop of fruit; and then began slowly to die, because a boring beetle had made its way into the tree and was eating its heart. Cherries fall during the stoning period;

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have spared, they will throw stones, their caps, nay, spades, at the laughing blackbird.

He will be momentarily defeated. And it is for something called 'sparrers' or 'them plaguèd sparrers' that gardeners keep their most vehement hatred. These little brown birds, which at times, for want of something worse to do, hop upon the rose beds and rose bushes, eating green fly, do not keep to green fly. They will go for green peas (as will the charming-looking tomtits), and they will go for seeds. I have known one gardener who does not prepare his seed beds, but, after sowing, throws down great clods upon what he has sown. He claims in this way to get better results, because he says: 'If you puts down sifted earth, they sparrers knows. They knows there's seeds there. They says: "Come on, boys: all ready for us!" and they just sets to, and eats 'em up!' I have never seen the results of his attempt to outwit the sparrows; but he is a morose fellow, who talks to himself as he looks for signs of scab and bleeding and the codlin moth.

It is a marvel to me that anything in the garden survives at all. I have caught and condemned thousands of slugs; I have walked about with a huge tank upon my shoulders, spraying roses and lilies which were swarming with green fly; I have permitted the use of pieces of broken mirror as bird-scares; I have chased dozens of dogs and geese from the garden; I have seen little asters laid low in a night, and hunted for caterpillar, wireworm, and the like; and as fast as I have seemed to deal with one pest another has taken its place. If the weather is not too dry it is too wet. Frost on summer nights seems to be quite common. Lupins shed their blooms, and giant poppies allow their roots to degenerate into pulp. Annuals, so called 'hardy', have perished in their seed boxes. A much appreciated pear tree this year had—for the first time—a fine crop of fruit; and then began slowly to die, because a boring beetle had made its way into the tree and was eating its heart. Cherries fall during the stoning period;

and so do plums. Wasps hurry to be born in time for such fruit as manages to survive. I am told that as fast as man discovers an antidote to any pest, whether insect or fungus, the insect or fungus learns to adapt itself to the antidote, and even to thrive upon it. Is it any wonder the gardener is gloomy?

I, being only fractionally—as it were—a gardener, can relish what remains. I can say: ‘Well, the apples are a frost this year; but the raspberries and gooseberries have cropped well. The love-in-a-mist may have failed; but the nemesia has been brighter and more charming than ever. The delphiniums may have been inferior; but the anchusa——’ And when I pronounce the name ‘anchusa,’ my gardener, whose face during the recital has been a study in lightened gloom, becomes convulsed with anguish. For, unconsciously, I have touched upon the crowning bitterness of the gardener’s life.

When I mention ‘anchusa,’ as I say, he will be convulsed with anguish. And he will groan: ‘Self-sown, sir. All them what I pla-anted has come to nothing!’ It is too true. All gardeners know it to be true. You may sow seeds with the greatest care. You may give them beautiful soil, may water them, and tend them; and, as the Irish expressively say, they will ‘die on you.’ But if, in sowing, you happen to drop a seed upon a barren pathway, the seed which has so cunningly leapt from your hand will rear itself in monstrous beauty precisely in a spot where it is least wanted. The love-in-a-mist may not be flowering in their beds; but you ought to see them inside the woodshed! I will go so far as to say that a few months ago the finest snowdrops and crocuses were those which were blooming among the spinach and the cabbages. When you have done your best for a flower, and it fails, you have some reason to be aggrieved. But when a seed which has been carried by the wind, or dropped by a greedy bird, in the worst possible place for such a seed, has beaten all those upon which so much care has been lavished—then indeed is the

true bitterness of gardening revealed. Then does the gardener know despair and miserable laughter. It is at such a point that gloom settles; for all his work will seem to be so much time-wasting.

However, it will not do to suggest that there are no compensations in gardening. Bludgeoned by fate, the amateur gardener at times proudly produces his shrivelled turnips and his wizened potatoes. He eats an occasional maggoty plum or greengage. A tough green tomato may split under his eye in an effort to colour. He may snatch some raspberries from the caterpillars and some strawberries from the slugs. His apple trees may bear some fruit (our best Blenheim Orange has seven apples this year), and his plums, although ailing, may be rescued from small boys who tend to throw stones into the tree. He may manage two rather bitter cucumbers of three or four inches long, some roses (and the modern roses seem to fall to pieces within twelve hours of opening), some geums, a row of beans, and so on. But John Postman, trudging up the path to the house, will show himself a true gardener. He will say: 'I see you're same as me—got this black stalk in your potatoes. Why, I remember when I was a lad we didn't have no diseases like we have now. The potatoes used to be green until well into September. And broad beans, now . . .'

I suppose all gardeners are by way of being valetudinarians—not upon their own behalf, but upon that of the gardens in which they dig and suffer. One rarely sees a gardener smile. When two or three gardeners are gathered together, their talk always takes a mortuary turn; they talk of disease and pain and patent medicines, as very old country-women seem to do. Their heads are shaken. They are comparing notes about the ailments of their gardens, the uselessness of antidotes, the immunity of past times from the degeneracies of our day. Once I heard two gardeners laughing together. They had read a paragraph, in a newspaper, in which an amateur, a lady, had written that if one put a few saucers of



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water down by the strawberry beds the birds would spare the strawberries. 'The dear little birds!' laughed the gardeners, ferociously. 'In moi ga-arden there's all the water they can drink; and *still* they can't leave the netted strawberries alone. Bless their little hearts!' That was what these laughing gardeners were saying; and I could not help thinking of Jack Point's song:

He may wear a merry laugh upon his lip;  
But his laughter has an echo that is grim.

For that is what happens to gardeners. First they are hopeful; then they are disappointed; then they become apprehensive; and so, by stages, they arrive at a state of being thoroughly pessimistic, cynical, and gloomy. Nothing goes right for them. They are beaten by a task which is overwhelming, by difficulties which nothing can remove. Their work, which must be founded upon hope, and which should, because of its variety and uncertainty, fascinate them throughout all the days of the year, leaves this class of men melancholy and disbelieving. If they get good results, they cannot suppose these results to be due to anything but mocking accident. More often, they do not get good results. Hence the pessimism.

We who wander idly through the gardens of others can admire at ease. We see the beautiful blooms, and the straight rows of vegetables; we see the trimness and the elegance of the garden, and wish that we might share in this 'purest of human pleasures.' But the gardener, walking beside us, sees weeds springing up where he has lately hoed. He sees a dozen flowers that need staking. He knows that his phlox blooms are only half the size they should be. Some disease has attacked his carnations. Those clarkias have gone off very quickly. The sweet peas are looking poorly. . . . There is this wrong and that wrong; and as for the little blank spaces, each one of them cries out to him. His face grows longer

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and longer. He whips out his big, curly knife. . . . I wonder that, instead of scraping around some sickly plant for the hateful creature that is battenning upon its roots, he does not apply that knife to his own throat.

For the true gardener is an idealist. He knows what the world—and the garden—should really be like. And he is all the time failing to deal with the evils afflicting the garden, just as idealists in other spheres are failing to deal with evils afflicting the world. He is fighting hard every day and all day long. We, who look on, believe that in time the gardeners of the earth will conquer, just as we know that without them our gardens would be wildernesses, and our world a menagerie. But the gardeners cannot see their own efforts as we see them. They do not know that what they do is stupendous; they cannot appraise the strength which makes them good-tempered even in adversity—even in despair. Gardeners may be gloomy; but they have hearts of gold. It is because they have hearts of gold that they are gloomy; because otherwise they would either kill themselves or run swiftly from their gardens into some other, less devastating, industry, where their skill and patience would be invaluable.



## THE DUTY OF BEING AGREEABLE

A WRITER of genius has just been condemning the pernicious modern cult of kindness and considerateness towards others, which he angrily calls 'tolerance.' This repulsive habit of mind, he says, is growing more and more popular in England, until it threatens to destroy everything that is worthy of the crusader's zeal. The genius is perturbed. The spectacle of an agreeable—that is to say, a tolerant—world appals him. He is for the rudeness, the impatience, the healthy offensiveness of other days.

What then? 'You lie' and doormat below stairs  
Takes bump from back,

as Chesterton, parodying Robert Browning, once wrote. He is for the giant among the pigmies, the autocrat among the groundlings, dealing cuffs and blows where he pleases, savage, peremptory, and above reason. He is for strife and quarrelsomeness, for insult and injury. In a word, he is for intolerance, as some people are for war, upon the ground that civilization is a mistake, and that we all ought to try to be little barbarians. Is it any wonder that he is annoyed by the tolerance—which is mental good-behaviour—which listens kindly and with sympathy to his own fulminations?

I wish I could believe that this general passion for good behaviour—as described by the impatient genius—had lately seized the population of these islands in its firm grip. But, judging by the conduct of a good many persons whom I see, the evil habit of kindness, even though it may be increasing,

has not yet sapped all the brusque impulses of hatred and tyranny from our national character. Many people are still rude to those who dare not hit back, and quarrelsome with those who *can* (and do) hit back, and provocative to all others whose combative resources are unknown. They continue to stalk through life as though other folk are merely impertinent or grotesque.

With haughty stare  
And nose in the air,

they continue to be bad-mannered and disagreeable. Foreigners have for so long seen these intolerant ones parading Continental streets during holiday times, that they have come to believe that the English are all conceited, imperious, and ill-behaved. Hence the popularity of the English in other countries.

I have never been able to understand why the bad-mannered are bad-mannered, as it were, on principle. There are some who are even conceited about their bad-manners. I have seen motorists 'cut in' unforgivably, and signify the utmost complacency over their feat. I have seen and heard snubs administered by well-dressed women in shops, as a result of which the snubbers were quite elated by their own skill in the art of vanquishing the defenceless. Such snubs, also, have been repeated to me by the snubbers, always with deep self-satisfaction. More than this—in days gone by, when I was an inoffensive young man, I have myself been affronted by those who believed rudeness to be in some way clever and necessary. I wonder what is the cause of this strange perversion of the human spirit. What does Mrs. Switch, upon one side of the counter, really think of herself when she insults Miss Nobbs, who is upon the other? What she *says*, of course, is that these girls are getting quite too dreadfully impertinent, and need constantly to be quelled; but is that what she believes? I do not suppose it can be. I think Mrs. Switch is probably un-

happy, 'nervy,' a sufferer from indigestion. I think she probably, at times, hardly knows what she is saying. And yet Mrs. Switch, in administering the snub, must have considered that she had something more than the mere power to affront. She must have felt sure that she had the *right* to snub, as well as the duty of snubbing.

And what, when insulted, is Miss Nobbs to do? Is she to 'answer back'? If she does, she will lose her situation. Is she to smile satirically? If she does this she will almost certainly be accused of further impertinence. She may, in fact, become impertinent; but only if she is a potential Mrs. Switch, and already has a little pink nose as a result of gobbling her food, or a little sore heart as the result of some private trouble with Mr. Blank or Miss Dash, or with Mrs. Nobbs (her mother) or a dozen other Mrs. Switches.

For her livelihood's sake, Miss Nobbs will be more likely to submit than to protest; and when Mrs. Switch, with one last stern, self-complacent glance of power, has left the shop, Miss Nobbs will tell her companions about the scene. 'That old gel,' she will say. 'That old cat . . .' I am sorry to say that she will probably invent a marvellous retort by means of which she will claim to have crushed Mrs. Switch. And, as a writer of fiction, I regret still more to say that Miss Nobbs's masterly retort will at once be dismissed by her friends as a fabrication. '*She* never said that,' they will whisper to each other. 'She made that up!' A lie that convinces nobody—not even the teller of the lie—is ignominious. 'As thrilling as any novel,' as the critics frequently say about books of memoirs; meaning 'And as little to be believed.'

Well, now, here we have malice, pride, resentfulness, the worst kind of falsehood (the incredible), and sophistication, all arising from a little scene which need never have occurred if only Mrs. Switch had been able to hold her tongue. Mrs. Switch's heart and tongue have been blackened by wickedness. Miss Nobbs's day has been spoiled, and her view of life and

humanity has been soured. An 'impossible situation' has been created. Two courses are open to Mrs. Switch—the course of contrition or hard-heartedness. Either she can feel ashamed of herself, in which case she will stay away from the shop in which Miss Nobbs is employed, and give her custom elsewhere, which will not mend matters (or manners); or, as is more probable, she will glory in her own brusqueness and evil tongue, and be confirmed in the belief that in salutary rudeness she has discovered the key to good living.

With this notion firmly fixed in her mind, she will go out of her way to administer snubs in every quarter. She will generally—it is an instinct—choose as her victims those who are most inoffensive. She will attack the tender, the forgiving, the innocent, knowing that they can be wounded to the heart, and that they cannot effectively counter. Mrs. Switch's arrogance will increase poisonously with every easy triumph. A passion for snubbing will seize her. 'Oh,' she will say, archly, to her friends; 'have you never been able to think of an answer to people who say "Pleased to meet you"? I always say "Not at all." ' Spoiled by the laughter which this reported answer provokes, and by the consternation which she can plant in simple hearts, Mrs. Switch will become the slave of her tongue. If the fancy persists, she will become like King Gama, in *Princess Ida*, who is surprised when, after boasting that

To all their little weaknesses I open people's eyes,  
And little plans to snub the self-sufficient I devise,

he finds himself described as a disagreeable man. He says he 'can't think why'; but I am sure he knows; and I am sure Mrs. Switch knows why she is occasionally shunned, although the shunning angers her and increases her habitual ill-behaviour.

When I was in America two or three years ago, I stayed in one of the big Middle-Western cities at an hotel the proprietors of which had drawn up a list of instructions for their

employees. I do not recollect what the instructions were, and I have forgotten the wording of the note which caught my attention most particularly; but it was to this effect:

Be courteous to all. That modest, unassuming man may be a millionaire.

I will not dwell upon the fact that I waited vainly to be treated as a millionaire; but will pass to what I believe to be the notice which we should all—within the limits of self-respect and anti-priggishness—carry in our minds. It is:

Be courteous to all. That modest, unassuming creature *is*, quite certainly, an immortal soul.

'What!' cries Mrs. Switch, at this point; 'am I expected to turn the other cheek to all and sundry? I won't do it! Unless you keep these people in their place (or is it places?) they'll take advantage of you. I know them. You poor simpleton. Learn a little of human nature, I implore, before you turn wiseacre!'

The term 'human nature' is the key to the whole situation. There is not a Mrs. Switch nature and a Miss Nobbs nature, as Mrs. Switch supposes ('Ourselves' and 'Those others'); but one nature common to Mrs. Switch and Miss Nobbs. Would Mrs. Switch like to stand behind a counter all day? She would *not* like to do so. To her, a whole day of such work would be torture. 'Oh, but fish *like* to be caught,' says Mrs. Switch; 'and girls such as Miss Nobbs have no finer feelings. They're not brought up to expect anything different!' Stupid Mrs. Switch, who cannot escape from herself by imagining what other people feel. Rather ridiculous Mrs. Switch, who knows nothing of Miss Nobbs's equally remorseless eye for the weaknesses of Mrs. Switch. Old-fashioned Mrs. Switch, for ignoring all the signs of the times—the clothes of Miss Nobbs, her hairdressing, her extraordinary gift for—in the evenings and at holiday-times—looking like



exactly all the Mrs. Switches in England. And, in the end, wicked Mrs. Switch, for going about the world, as she does, blaspheming against human nature.

I am now going to reveal a great secret to all who have suffered from the ill-behaviour of Mrs. Switch. It is, that just as midges cannot endure the scent of lavender water, so Switches cannot bear to be treated with tolerance, or good manners. When, full of rudeness, she is met by agreeable calm, she is instantly deflated. I once heard a hysterical nursemaid weeping and shouting to a sympathetic friend: 'And after I'd said I was *going*, she come downstairs as cool as *cool*!' I imagine that the victor in this contest may have been a disagreeable woman; but what if she were not? What if her coolness were but pride, but tolerance? Picture to yourselves the havoc created by such good manners in a Switch of the nursery! Picture how rudeness was checked by courtesy and composure! Imagine Switch—for Mrs. Switch may be a bad-mannered nursemaid as well as a bad-mannered mistress—behaving rudely. Bring yourself to the thought of Mrs. Switch, back at the counter, insulting an imperturbable Miss Nobbs. I know it is difficult to do this. The Miss Nobbses of the world are very sensitive and are easily fluttered. But it is not impossible. Dignity is to be found in every class and in every calling. And I say that dignity and calm and good temper will always check rudeness—even in a person who can be checked by no other means.

The explanation is that it is impossible to be disagreeable without knowing that one is disagreeable. And to be met by agreeable manners when one knows that one is being disagreeable is in itself a severe lesson. The disagreeable person is quick enough in the wits to perceive the end of power. Quick enough, also to make a comparison and feel a sense of inferiority to the agreeable person. Anger gives way to respect, and respect to emulation. Just so, I imagine, does a naughty pony sense mastery in a new pair of hands upon

the reins. The disagreeable person, conscious at last of infirmity, becomes apologetic. I have seen it happen. Tolerance, kindness—call the response by any name you will—are all indications that the possessor has attained to self-mastery. The disagreeable person, however cultured, is a savage; and the savage will always be controlled by that which is civilized. Even the genius to whom I referred at the beginning of this article is only angry at present because he knows he is going to laugh in a moment and become a good little boy again. He is, so to speak, at the kicking stage; but he is beginning to hide his face, to which uncontrollable smiles of shame and recovered good-temper, and a sense of his own ridiculousness, are rushing.

To be agreeable it is not necessary to be slavish. It is most undesirable that one should be patronizing, as many good workers, district visitors, and the like, too frequently are. To be agreeable, all that is necessary is to take an interest in other persons and in other things, to recognize that other people as a rule are much like oneself, and thankfully to admit that diversity is a glorious feature of life. One must not be conceited. One must not flatter, because flattery is a condescension or a servility. One must merely recognize the existence of other personalities than one's own. The wisest man I have ever known once said to me: 'Nine out of every ten people improve on acquaintance'; and I have found his words true. Nine out of every ten—what if one should oneself be the tenth?

To me, that is a very terrible doubt. It would be enough, at all times, to make me hesitate in delivering a snub, or in behaving disagreeably even under provocation. The world has grown so close about us, and we are woven into its texture so finely, that we are nowadays more than ever dependent upon the goodwill of our fellow-creatures. Take away that goodwill, that kindness, that love; and we cannot exist. In self-defence alone, if in no other interest, it is our

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duty to behave agreeably to others. But not only in self-defence. Rather, in recognition and repayment of all the goodwill and all the love that enables us to live our short lives at peace with our neighbours. If they were hostile, we should die. They are not hostile. They are extraordinarily humane. An appreciation of that fact—and of course, since we have blood and not milk in our veins, we cannot love everybody—should make us, if not affectionate, at least modest.

## CATS

THE other day I was turning over the pages of an old French primer, and I came across two sentences intended for translation by the young. They were: *Le chien est l'animal le plus fidèle. Le chat est un animal très égoïste.* And, as if these assertions left any question in the pupil's mind, there followed in the next exercise the words: 'The dog is very faithful. The cat is extremely selfish.' Now, I am far from supposing that sentences in French primers claim to express profound truths, because, if that were so, it would mean that all uncles specialized in pens and all gardeners possessed amiable sisters; but these two repeated statements are by way of being general assertions. They do not say: 'My cat is extremely selfish'; they imply: 'All cats are extremely selfish.'

Maurice Maeterlinck, also, has dramatized the sentence in *The Blue Bird*, possibly through a recollection of lessons learned in youth. His dog is all that is excellent; his cat is a libel. Children are thus assured, in their most tender years, that whereas the dog is faithful, the cat thinks only of itself. The one statement may be true enough; the other is entirely false. Some cats may be disdainful; they may be sly; they may fuff and spit and scratch. In these respects they are not unlike some human beings. And yet I have heard one man who spoke in a spiteful way of another rebuked with the words: 'Tell me, Jones, as cat to cat!' What a libel! May not cats, in private talk, rebuke each other equally with the remark, 'Tell me, Tiddles, as man to man'?

For it is true of cats, as it is true of men, that if you bring

up a cat in the way he should go, he will not depart from that way all the days of his life. A cat that is treated as a chattel will think meanly of itself. It will creep and run, steal food, and be generally ignominious. Whereas a cat that is treated as a feline being will respond to the intelligence of its owners and will reveal the most remarkable qualities.

Of Mrs. Gummidge (a rather thoughtful cat who lived with my family) a visitor who had been trained in a bad school once said, wonderingly: 'She isn't like a cat; she's more like a friend.' The remark was true. Gummidge was a friend. She pushed her way into the family circle whenever she could. She appeared inconveniently at considerable distances from home, being bent upon taking walks with members of the family, as if she had been a dog; and she had to be carried home again before the walk could be continued. She was a bad mother, for this reason; and when her single kitten was born, she punctuated its early squeals from another room with annoyed, reproving growls of her own, through a wish that this newcomer should not interrupt companionship with her beloved humans. The kitten was nothing to Gummidge. Poor Bubble (so called because she squeaked)! Her early life was melancholy indeed. Only later did she become adorably naughty, and as attached as her mother to the two-legged species of animal.

I have agreed that there are cats and cats. In French villages one may see truly deplorable cats (just as one may see truly deplorable dogs), who are all the time scavenging, running grimily in and out among chickens, and sitting, filthy and very matter-of-fact, upon depressing doorsteps. It is clear that these are material-minded cats. Their thoughts run upon food and the avoidance of blows. Of delicate nurture they know nothing. One may see women like this in poor districts in England—not quite anxious, not quite starved, but by circumstances reduced to a daily diet of frowsy economy. Such are the cats in a French village. Their one notable

feature is that as a rule they seem to be upon negligent terms with the dogs of the village, who are similarly given to scavenging, and whose range of padding exploration is wider and more adventurous.

In an English village cats are very different. They seem better cared-for. Many of them are smug. They almost put their plump grey paws before their mouths as they yawn, and, through having no cares, they are apt to grow fat and lazy. To such cats food is so much a matter of course that it is a source of reverie. When I see some of these plump English village cats, I sometimes wonder why they do not wear black silk dresses in the afternoon, with gold lockets about their necks. I wonder that none of them has ever sent me cards of invitation to saucer-parties, marked 'Games,' and 'Cushions at ten.'

There are millions of common tabby cats all over England, some of them a dusty brown with thin bony streaks of black through the brown, and some as richly decorated with fawn and chestnut as one can imagine. There are cream cats and grey cats, brown cats, Siamese cats, Persians, carrot, tortoiseshell, and a hundred other sorts. And just as the stupid may dismiss working people as uninteresting, so one may foolishly dismiss the tabbies as uninteresting. One may care only for the earls and duchesses among cats, or at lowest the dames and courtesy ladies, and in that case one will learn very little about the humanity of true feline nature. For me the tabby is the best of all the cats, and the most charming cat I ever knew was a tabby.

An old friend of mine once told me that he could never take any interest in novels about people who had incomes of less than a thousand pounds a year. I forgot to ask him whether he drew a line in the matter of cats, but it is possible that for him cats do not exist at all. Now, my own experience is that birth and breeding are quite as likely with cats as they used to be with humans to produce superficial sameness.

The aquiline nose and pallor of the Honourable Mabel have affinity with the supercilious uninterestingness of the Honourable Fiddlededee. The sameness, perhaps, is not essential sameness, but is a hauteur, a strong entrenchment behind manner, a slight lack of camaraderie, which entirely conceals strong personality from the casual eye. I have never really enjoyed my contacts with pedigree cats. These duchesses of the feline world are very beautiful, and no doubt—since their owners do so—one can love them reverently; but, just as I am bored by majestic ladies, so I have great weakness for the less ceremonious cat, who regards friendship with a person of the human species as at least a possibility. A cat should have rubbed shoulders with the world to be really attractive.

Nor do I greatly care for the much-admired Siamese. I have only known two of these, and one was a howling and disconsolate wanderer with a murderous hatred of cats less regal than himself, while the other was a poor half-witted creature who was too terrified of everything and everybody to respond to any form of kindness. Friends of mine are idolatrous of the Siamese, and I admit his extraordinary beauty. The piercing blue eyes, and the rich brown and fawn of his coat, make him an animal to be admired. But beauty is not everything, and my friends may keep their Siamese (if they can), with no fear of any design of mine to steal or alienate the affections of their idol.

For it comes to this, that I like the really human cat. I like a cat that will treat a dog with contempt, and by impassivity will turn the dog into a disquieted and humbled visitor with important errands elsewhere. And then, having routed the dog, will reveal the fact that the battle has been a nervous strain, and the victory won not without courage. I do not write as anti-dog (far from it!) and the pleasure I describe arises not from the discomfiture of the dog, but from the courage of the cat. The dog will quickly dismiss the scene from his attention, because dogs have many interests; while

the cat, subsiding again, will tremble slightly, will feverishly lick a paw (much as the agitated human will cough or blow his nose), and will philosophically realize that what has happened may happen again, with a less fortunate issue. Cats know very well indeed that courage comes and goes with the wind, that one is brave to-day, but that to-morrow sudden loss of nerve may ruin all, and set one scampering headlong before a barking fury.

And another type of cat that I admire is the observant. I once knew a little cat—the most beautiful tabby I ever saw—who would stand upon a chair, with her paws resting upon the cross-bar of its spindled back, watching for half an hour together the coming and going of people and dogs and other little cats in the roadway outside the house. Romeo, for that was this cat's name, had other characteristics, but her intentness of observation was extraordinary. Always the intentness became passionate when another cat could be seen, but the attitude, so delicately assumed and maintained, never varied. Romeo it was who would return, racing, from any distance when I whistled for her as one whistles for a dog. And upon arrival Romeo would insist upon giving a long history of her ramble. She could not rest until she had told the tale of all that she had seen. Observation again, you will notice; and I should imagine good observation, because Romeo was a realist. No dog could have been more faithful than this open-air cat; no dog, certainly, was ever more intelligent or more full of whimsy and attachment.

I have seen it objected, by a dog-lover, that whereas a dog caresses those he loves, a cat caresses *herself* against those who love her. Was there ever anything more grotesque! It would be as fair to say that a dog caresses with the object of pleasing or placating, and a cat for its own delight. Is the lover's caress wholly unselfish? On the contrary. It is a proud and privileged self-gratification. But the charge of selfishness against the cat is so easily made by those who do not care for



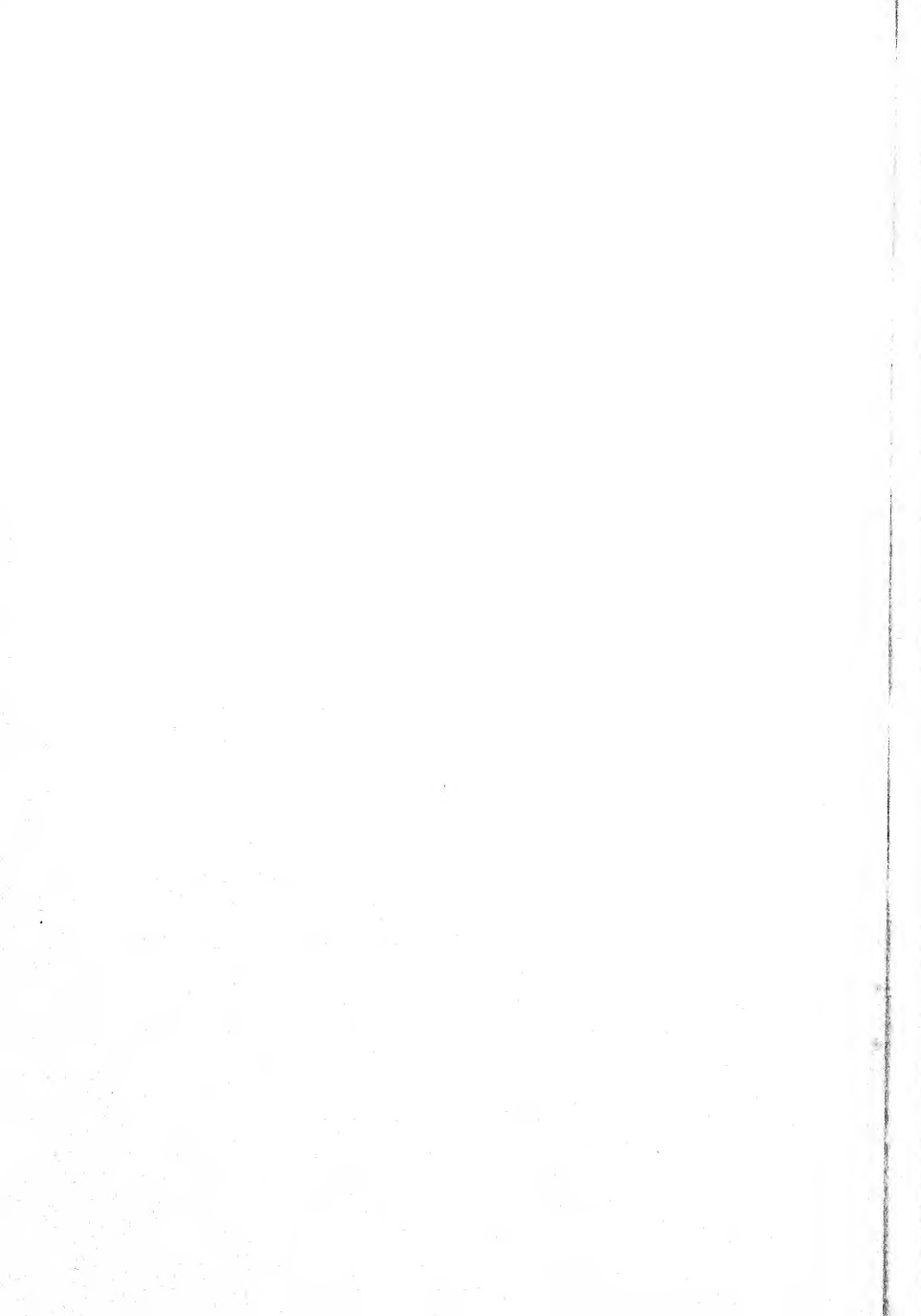
cats and those who resent their dignity. There are some who are puzzled and even terrified by the silence and restraint of cats. There are some to whom the jolly boisterousness of the dog seems hearty and English. There are some who prefer dogs because a dog will cringe under a master's blow and will unresentingly suffer any personal indignity. It is not my present purpose to arraign or to defend the dog. The dog has far too many lovers to need defence, and I am not the one to conduct an arraignment. But I must be allowed to say that the dog is for those who require demonstrative affection, and for those who like to feel masterful; while the cat is for those who care little for demonstrative affection, and much more for the subtle intimacies of the spirit.

I say this with full recognition of the fact that the best of domestic cats become unruly when there is fish for dinner (I cannot speak of the duchesses, because of course the duchesses may despise fish) or when the wind is high. I will not gloss over the fish, but will manfully admit its strange effects. To the wind, however, we owe the spectacle of intoxicated cats careering through our houses, and prancing sideways with feathered tails and flashing eyes, electrically transfigured into furies, which we should never have if there were not this strange creator of madness in the demure. The most sedate of cats may yield to the wind as vehemently as the young and excitable. What is the cause of the phenomenon? I do not know. But when the wind dies down, Tippetty-witchet will be found lazily yawning, soft and warm in his bed, stretching long paws idly to the sunshine, as if he had never been the insane, capering creature of the previous night. He will look dreamily over the top of his head, as if inviting play, until it will be hard to believe that it has been he, and not a nightmare, that has been so active.

But it has been Tippetty-witchet all the time, for Tip is the Proteus among animals. Watch him trembling and silently maiowing and lashing his tail, while sparrows chirp and peck

at crumbs outside the window. Watch him silently dismissing a dog or another cat from the garden. Watch him assisting in the kitchen, sitting very quietly upon the corner of the table as meat is prepared for lunch, and every now and again suppressing with a lick that uncontrollable paw which has been raised to take something not intended for him. Watch him lolling before the fire, stretched in a paroxysm of sensuous happiness upon the hearthrug; or stalking a beetle as it wriggles its way over the gravelled path. Recall the stealthy and terrifying quietness of Tip's concern with a mousehole; the noisiness and volubility of his explanations as he returns breathless from a marauding expedition. He is never the same cat (and when I say 'he,' I ought to add 'she,' since in my own experience the female cat is sometimes more clever and more attractive than the male) for two hours together. A dog is more likely to be the same—what the dog-lover would call 'dependable'—but a cat is incalculable.

I insist that a cat is not selfish, any more than a charming human being is selfish; but Mr. Kipling's cat, that walked by its lone, is at the bottom of all cats. Strange, fascinating, charming creatures they are, these cats. They are like ourselves. We are all familiar with the exciting phrase about the *gant de velours* and the *main de fer*. It is so that I think of cats, as incarnate will. One may win them with love; but one cannot 'train' them. They will come and go as they list; will caress or will not caress as they feel inclined; but after long experience of many cats, I know that this will of theirs is not selfishness. It is a quality to admire in cats as in human beings, this unbendable personality; and if we are wise we shall recognize it as such. And the next time a strange cat turns indifferently from our proffered caress, we shall say to ourselves: 'This isn't selfishness; it's a snub to me for being gushing.' And we shall pat with impunity the next dog that trots up to us and servilely noses into our hands for a stranger's valueless greeting.



## SWANK

**D**INED well,' wrote Samuel Pepys, on May 4, 1662, 'and after dinner I walked with my wife to my brother Tom's; our boy waited on us with his sword, which this day he begins to wear, to outdo Sir W. Pen's boy, who this day, and Sir W. Batten's, too, begin to wear new livery.' Nowadays this 'outdoing' would be called 'swank,' and 'swank' is a very convenient expression, because it sums up and at the same time ridicules a most curious instinct which is not confined to the human species. I have known a dog with a bandaged paw to 'swank,' exhibiting his bandage, limping, and casting quick glances in order to make sure that his new decoration was properly observed. 'Swank' is swagger, snobbishness, pretentiousness, and boastfulness. It is 'showing-off.' It may take the form of Mrs. Wayward's 'we were dining with the Bishop last night,' or young Mr. Towser's explosive parade upon his new motor-bicycle. The bare head of the hirsute and the heavy tipping of the suddenly wealthy; the incessant intellectualism of the highly-educated or the heightened speed of the new proprietor of the motor-launch, are examples of 'swank.'

'Swank' may be exhibited by means of an expensive fur coat (such as one may often see at popular resorts in quite warm weather), or an expensive motor-car, or what is called 'late dinner with the blinds up.' It may take the form of loud voices in the theatre or restaurant; and of shuddering refinement under the assault of loud voices. It may be more delicate, as in the elaborately accidental mention of some half-forgotten

achievement, the extravagantly accurate pronunciation of a foreign tongue, intrusive references to travel, to possessions, connections, and tastes or distastes. In every case the motive is the same—the desire to seem rather more important, rather more refined, rather richer or more able, than other people. Possibly the desire to seem rather more distinguished than general esteem quite admits.

This is one of the most vulgar of human cravings. It is one of the most amusing, and need not make us very sad. No doubt many readers will recall the boasting match between Sentimental Tommy and his friend Shovel, in which each of these two little boys makes claims to indirect superiority over the other. Shovel concludes by saying that 'My father were once at a hanging,' to which Tommy, who has absolutely no alternative, retorts: 'It were my father what was hanged!' To this there is no answer except a knock-down blow, and the blow is administered. Unfortunately blows become more rare (even, one gathers, in the boxing-ring) as the doctrine of safety first finds more adherents; and Tommy and Shovel set an example in fisticuffs which is not followed by their elders. Groaning, we submit to the tyranny of 'swank,' which is essentially a childish and ridiculous thing, but which is none the less a tyranny.

I feel this tyranny is increasing. Of old, if we can believe what we read, there were distinct cleavages between the classes and the masses. One set of people behaved in accordance with a clear convention; the other set, or sets, had their own kind of life. But with the rise of democracy has occurred the rise of another feeling altogether. This is the spirit of social emulation. In the effort to show that Jack is as good as his master we are given over to display. We put our few little goods in the window, and almost out of the window, so as to catch the attention of all who pass. Nowadays, for example, we must all have motor-cars. If we do not have them we shall be regarded as altogether behind the times. I myself have

a motor-car, which I love and fear, and I could not bear to be without a car, although, for all the use I make of it, I should economize by hiring a much more impressive affair as often as I needed it. This is 'swank,' but timid 'swank,' and the hired Rolls-Royce or Daimler is the genuine article.

But I am not alone in the feeling that ownership of a self-driven vehicle is a necessity. Even village youths, who wear their hair shingled, and who sport Byronic collars, are no longer content to walk or cycle, as they have done until recently. They also must have their automobiles. They must whizz and flutter along the rustic lanes raising dust and the ugly smell of burnt oil. They must look as nearly as possible like the stage beauties whose photographs they see in the picture papers. The most appalling garments in the loudest colours, decorate the village green on Saturday evenings. No longer prowess, but show, plumage, 'air,' 'swank,' is the manly grace by which our youngsters attract the eye.

It is the same elsewhere. In the suburbs, for example. Gardening is going out, and 'swank' is coming in. It is no longer possible for two young suburbans to be honestly poor. They must have fine weddings, go to swagger resorts for their honeymoon, have trousseaux, dinner parties, bridge parties and the like, in imitation of the wealthier folk. Up the river they must go, and up to the West End of London. Their homes are all *façade*—skimped under the superficial show. And a car—always a car. At the very least, a motor-cycle combination. . . .

But at all costs, though the home is run on tinned food and kitchen requisites are missing, the great god 'swank' must be cultivated. It is for 'swank' that young boys and girls of poor families are turning from honest labour to all sorts of easy and precarious means of livelihood. It is for 'swank' that fine clothes, jewels, and other expensive adornments are being worn by those who cannot afford to pay for them. It is for 'swank' that large numbers among the semi-middle-

class population are upon anxious, laughing terms with bankruptcy.

And yet, *naïve* and crude as so much of this apeing and pretentiousness is, how amusing the 'swankers' can be! Listen to them saying, 'I adaw it,' under the impression that to say 'adaw' is aristocratic. Watch them bowling up in a large vermilion motor-car to the swagger entrance of a vast hotel created especially for such as themselves, and see them strolling in what they believe to be the best-bred manner through the lounge. Observe the feminine members of the party throwing open their fur coats to exhibit the jewels about their necks and upon their fingers. Hear them call for expensive wines and cigars. And notice how silent they are, except in small hurricanes of animated talk, as they sit about the luncheon table. Their only happiness is to be found in ostentation; and when that is achieved they do not know what to do next. For 'swank' is like a firework-display. Once it has taken place, the world is completely empty. There is nothing to follow, except the dull homeward trek.

There are other forms of 'swank' than those to which I have referred, but they all arise from the same attitude of mind; and it is the attitude rather than the manifestations of it that needs to be uncovered. The attitude is at bottom that of Master Bosher, in one of Talbot Baines Reed's school stories, who writes in his diary: 'How great is the world: how small am I in the world.' We 'swank' because we feel small. That sense of inequality, of instinctive unfavourable comparison, even of positive inferiority, seems to me to run through the majority of human beings like a flaw. When they are children, they feel small and weak and powerless (unless they are petted into conscious magnificence), and in order to attract notice they boast. 'Look at me!' they say, 'I'm the King o' the Castle!' But they do not really believe that they can resist the strength of the grown-ups. They know that for all their bold words, all their 'swank,' they can

quickly be dragged from the castle to that hateful ablution, bed, darkness, and oblivion. Into their bones creeps the terrifying knowledge that there is more in life than meets the eye.

They see children more fortunate than themselves. 'Why can't *I* have it?' they ask. At last they get something that other children have not got. Active, material 'swank' is born in them. They pedal the tricycle or propel the scooter; they carry the doll or wheel the bassinette. Very prettily and charmingly, they 'show-off.' In appearance, they are only proud and happy; but they are at the same time both reassured and puzzled. They are reassured, because the new toy gives them delight and some new confidence; but they are puzzled because life will not stand still. Their rivals, they find, have new toys. It is like the race for armaments among the grown-ups. Having shown-off, they are again in arrears, and at a disadvantage. All, that is, except the very happy children who have chosen their parents wisely and fastidiously, and who make no comparisons. But these happy children are those who are born not to 'swank.' They are the odd fellows of their kind. They are born to be fools or leaders, and most often leaders because they go straight forward to whatever goal is in view, without looking round and about to see what others are doing and thinking, or whether others are impressed. Against such leaders the ordinary person has no refuge but 'swank.' If he has not the reality, he must pretend; and 'swank' is a pretence.

If Mrs. Tubbs finds that her next-door neighbour is not interested in her, she must endeavour to impress the neighbour. She must exaggerate her own importance, and lie rather heavily. We once had a neighbour who claimed to be exceedingly superior. Her husband had estates in Russia, and expectations of much money. She herself had, until marriage, idled upon the golf courses and the tennis courts of England, plentifully supplied with money by her mother, accustomed



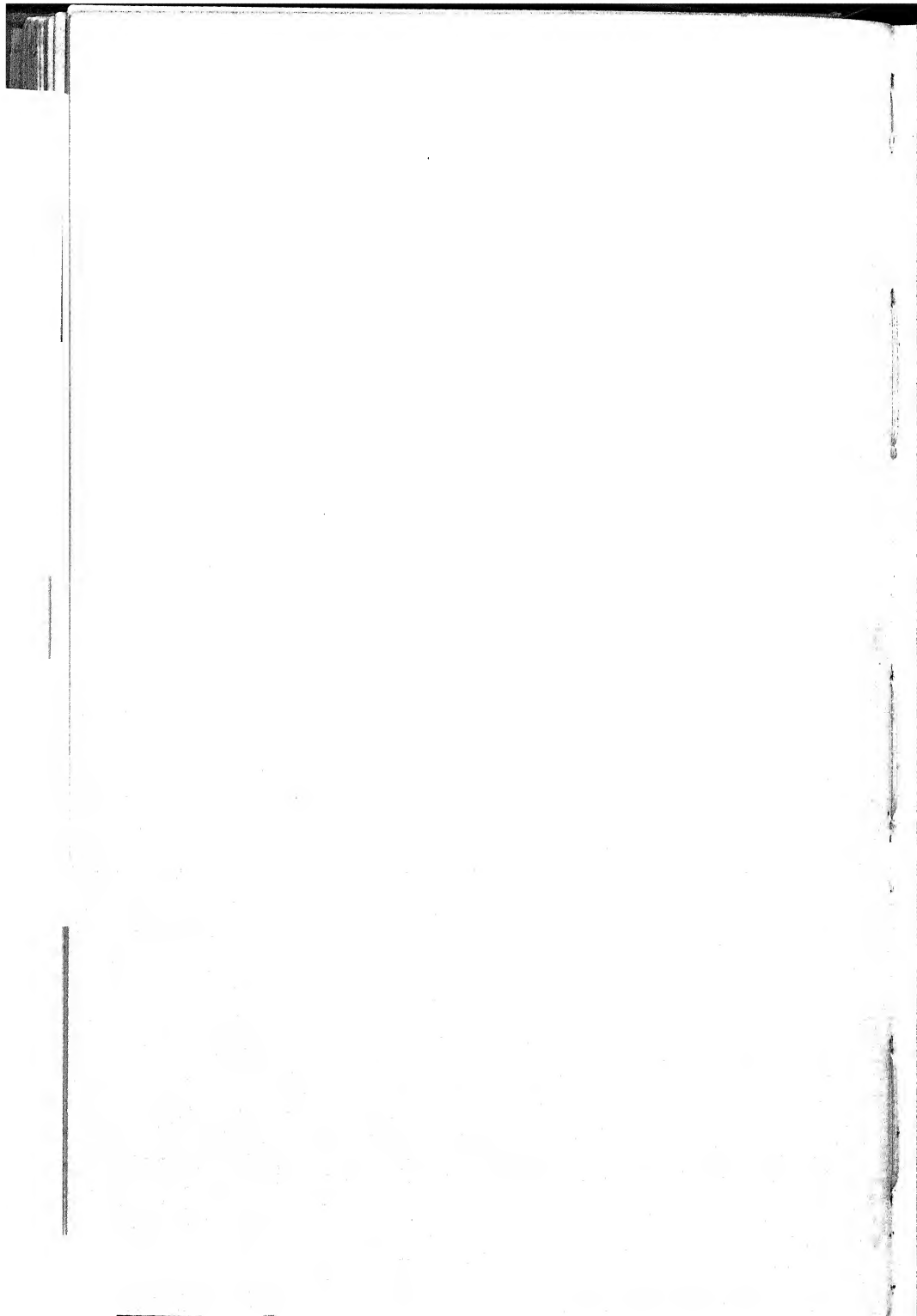
to luxury and the perfection of domestic service. And so on. Then the husband's estates shrank a little, and moved to Austria. His salary shrank a little. At last, one summer day, she announced—as an event—that she was going to have a bath. 'You have to, this weather; don't you!' said this born aristocrat.

What purpose was supposed to have been served by the 'swank,' I do not know. It was *naïve* and unconvincing at all times. But I think it must have helped this young woman to endure a very dull, spiritless sort of life. It was meant to impress; but it was also a kind of day-dream. Most 'swank' is like that. It is not very whole-hearted. And it comes frequently out of hearts that are sore, out of poor brains that are racked by bewilderment and trouble. Wise people do not 'swank,' because they have no need to do so. They are all the time sustained—I suppose—by their wisdom. The 'swanker,' with no real interest in life, has to fake one. With nothing really to tell the world about, he is compelled to boast. If he cannot work quietly in his garden, or in his workshop, or his study, he feels that he must give his species some justification of his existence. It is foolish of him, but it seems to be natural. And, as he has not the real goods to offer, he bangs the drum in order to dispose of the false.

But what a much better and more interesting world it would be if we had no 'swank' in it! If we could say that we did not know. If we could honestly admit that we were poor, and could not afford clothes and motor-cars, wireless sets, public schools for our boys, foreign schools for our daughters! How much happier, more thrifty, less anxious we should be! We should hardly know ourselves! Then, indeed, we should value and be valued for qualities of heart and mind, and not for the outward signs of material wealth. Those would be wonderful days. Rubbing our eyes, we can hardly imagine them. What! No struggle to pay school-fees beyond our means! No dressmakers' bills! No costly parties! No *motor-*

## SWANK

*cars!* Ah, well! The millennium will arrive when 'swank' dies; but there is no indication at present that 'swank' is more than a lusty infant, and he is likely to be long-lived. He is likely to continue to thrive until we are all too wise to live at all!



## ON THINKING WELL OF ONESELF

WE often envy the fortune of others, and wish that this fortune might be ours; but I have never met anybody who wished—who seriously wished—to change his or her own nature. And indeed we are so used to ourselves that we should find it hard to be different, or even to wish to be different, from what we are. A little touch here and there, perhaps, to check an extravagance or a bad habit, we may allow; but we feel it might be dangerous to tamper with so delicate a thing as the personality which has grown up with ourselves. Accordingly, even our faults have some attractiveness for us, and if we proclaim them it is with a kind of satisfaction, as if they were pleasant singularities.

We say, modestly: 'I know I'm rather quick-tempered'; but we really mean that a quick temper is better than a sullen one, and much more interesting as a possession than colourless tranquillity. We say: 'I'm very jealous,' meaning—not that we are stupid and base, but that our power of loving is both great and passionate. We say: 'My handwriting's atrocious,' and believe that bad handwriting is a sign of marked character or of immensely energetic fluency. And so on. But we do not make tremendous efforts to conquer these faults, partly from a sort of fatalism, which makes us believe that nothing will ever alter us, and partly because, however much we may admire and love other people, we do not wish to resemble them. We may wish to be as rich or as popular as others, as clever or as amiable, but if the choice were ever offered us of a complete exchange of personality,

I do not think there are many who are so gravely dissatisfied with themselves as to accept the offer.

This seems to me to be an agreeable thing about human nature as well as a very fortunate one. In youth we often imitate others—not always to our own improvement—and the more we mix with other people, the more we tend to copy their accent, their modes of thought and expression, their conventions and taboos. We dress according to fashion, follow the popular sports, like or dislike books or plays or people according to the taste of the moment among our friends. But as soon as we are aware that contrary opinions exist, we are inclined from a sort of instinct of opposition to run to such contrary opinions and make them our own. We announce these opinions, and argue them very warmly. Gradually we begin to have opinions of our own; and as soon as we have opinions of our own we are confident that these are the only right ones. In England—I do not know how it may be in other countries—considerable respect is shown to the opinions of the young; and so we are encouraged to believe that we are right, and in this way we are made even more confident of our own wisdom. If we argue well, we dominate others; if we argue ill, we are silently confirmed in the knowledge of our own essential rightness.

I am often in company with a number of friends who differ strongly from each other in both character and opinion, and it is very amusing to see how all of them come to battle with this confidence in their own rightness fully developed. They walk into the room with their heads high, and with charming smiles of benignity upon their faces. Calm and unruffled, they cheerfully greet each other. 'Now,' they seem to say, 'I am to conquer!' Nothing seems ever to put them out or shake their self-confidence. They are never furtive or abashed, but seem to live in expectation of victory and in assurance of power in any emergency whatever. All, in short, are people who think well of themselves.

This kind of assurance is a part of personal charm. All of us would rather be with those who smile at ease than with those who look glum or frightened; and if we cannot command the fresh prettiness of the young girl, or the superb nonchalance of the undergraduate, we must be thankful for other gifts. Those who are pleased with themselves are those who are thankful for the gifts they possess. More, they exult in them, and so increase their number. For one such gift is conscious happiness, which (since we cannot suppose our happiness to be altogether undeserved) produces in the possessor that smiling confidence which is such an amusing and agreeable social asset.

Thinking well of oneself is something quite different from self-importance. Recently a stockbroker, who was littering the pavement with moist cherry-stones, repulsed as an unwarrantable liberty the protest of a police constable who objected (in the public interest) to his action. He maintained in court that he had a right to strew cherry-stones everywhere, and was rebuked by the magistrate for self-importance. This sort of thing must not be confused with the quality I have been commending. Nor must the vulgar display of the conceited person—male or female—who in a railway carriage makes his or her fellow-passengers uncomfortable by shouting to the guard or to a companion, by assuming control over the windows, and by staring impertinently at every face and every pair of shoes within sight. We are all constantly meeting such displeasing types; but the self-importance of conceit is as offensive to those who think well of themselves as it is to those who do not think of themselves at all. Self-importance is anti-social. Thinking well of oneself is in the highest degree a social art. It is the exact contrary of self-importance.

It is something wholly different, also, from the instinct of tyranny which makes some of our neighbours seek endlessly to demonstrate their own wisdom and power. 'Oh, I suppose you're one of those people who think so-and-so....' 4

It's extraordinary.' Or, 'Come and sit here. . . . No here, beside me. . . . Because I *want* you to.' It is different from that silent consciousness of superiority which many of us find deplorable in slightly clever people. But those who feel superior take no pleasure in themselves. They take pleasure in nothing at all. Nothing is ever quite good enough for them. They are self-conscious because they feel superior to their fellows, and because they cannot force general acknowledgment of their superiority. It is something—apparently—so rare as to be caviare to the general. They have the disagreeable impression that the superiority of which they are aware at every turn is not sufficiently noticed by others.

A sort of unspoken duologue occurs between them and ourselves. 'Wouldn't you—if you could—like to be as profoundly learned as I am?' 'No.' 'Then I feel disdain for you.' 'Don't be silly!' 'I really *am* superior to you; only you don't appear to realize it. You're so stupid that you can't appreciate me. You go on being satisfied with foolish and commonplace delights; while I am satisfied with nothing. Therefore I will show by my negligent air that I despise you; but at the same time I shall keep a sharp watch upon you in case I find you making fun of me behind my back.'

Accordingly, the superior persons are shy or assertive as their company allows. Sometimes they are uncomfortable and incoherent, sometimes they are hectoring, sometimes unbearably supercilious. But they are not happy. They are not pleased with themselves. They are puzzled, watching those who are happy, and despising them for being so easily pleased; but in the same glance feeling the gall of envy, and secretly longing to be a little more common, a little happier, if only they could achieve the descent without violence to the uneasy longing to be better than other people.

I need hardly say that those who really have exceptional qualities are not aware of them. The master geniuses have mostly been very modest, so modest that they have been

interested in the lives and doings of others, however simple and unimpressive those lives and doings may have been. Hence their universality. Never have they been strangers at the feast; never have they held aloof through an unhappy contempt for common things and common people. How could they be contemptuous, since greatness cannot accommodate itself to petty emotions?

The reason for all such contempt as that which is felt by superior folk for others who are less sophisticated, lies in conceitedness and lack of imagination; but the conceited are to be pitied and not blamed, because as a rule we shun their company. We do not like them. The simple fact is that our affections are not much earned by the most impressive merits. We do not care for our friends because they are learned or clever or morally admirable. It is possible to be all of these things and to be very lonely. We like best those who are very simple; and so we listen to them in preference to those who are ostentatiously profound. We would all rather be in the company of somebody we like than in the company of the most superior being of our acquaintance.

And there is no denying that we are often extremely fond of those who are rather pleased with themselves. Not those who are spoilt and fractious, who *must* have everything their own way; but those bland, happy, contented people who carry their own sunshine everywhere; who look naïvely within for happiness; who have no apparent qualms of self-mistrust; who can receive compliments without growing anxious over a doubt as to whether the compliment is deserved or whether it has been seriously intended. How pleasant they are, these people who think well of themselves! How excellent in companionship! How we respond to the smiles with which they greet us—even although we feel quite sure that the smiles, like the graceful carriage, are due to inward satisfaction rather than to gladness at the sight of ourselves. Our hearts are filled with pleasure. Do not we—ever so



slightly, perhaps, catch something of that blandness, that ease, that tranquillity of spirit! Do not we—even we—feel, by infection, as it were, rather pleased with ourselves?

I think we do. I think we ought to. It seems to me to be a duty which we owe to society, to feel pleased with ourselves. Not satisfied, but pleased. For there are various kinds of self-love, and the best of these is adorable. It is not the self-infatuation of the very young, which is rather trying in large quantities; it is not the self-satisfaction of the vulgarly successful; it is not the self-complacency of the unco' guid. It is not smug, but bland. It is considerate, innocent, childlike. It is a testimony to innocence.

Those who are pleased with themselves are ready to be pleased with simple things and agreeable things. And this readiness to be pleased is what endears them to us—this, and their expectation that we shall be equally pleased. It springs from true modesty, for it is impossible to be pleased with oneself if one is always measuring oneself with others, always (so to speak) bringing oneself into the false and alarming glare of self-examination. Those who are pleased with themselves take life very much as they find it. And life treats them very well. Misery of long duration is unknown to them. They are buoyant and carefree. They know that if they tumble they will pick themselves up again, as they have always done before. And, being confident, they rarely tumble. They come into the room, to the battle, smiling; and they make us smile in return. How can we be severe with them?

A very little boy of my acquaintance, at the age of something between three and four, was once exceedingly naughty. His aunt became angry with him, and sent him to bed as a punishment. On his way to bed he put his small, round, rosy face round the edge of the door, and looked at his aunt with an ingratiating smile—with *the* ingratiating smile. She, although still rather stern, could not resist that pleasant glance. 'Come and let me give you a kiss before you go,'

said the aunt. The little boy came toward her. 'I *thought* you'd have to,' he said. His punishment was not cancelled; he duly went to bed; but there was no anger upon either side, and the little boy left the field with honour. When he grows up, that child will be pleased with himself. He will have—as he now has—noticeable charm. Nothing will ever go seriously amiss with him. The pleasure he takes in himself will be communicated to others. He will be liked, and his path through the years will be a smooth one. This is not all. Wherever he goes, he will carry happiness.

That, it seems to me, is the real reason why it is a duty to be pleased with oneself. We live among other people, and our attitude to ourselves should be such as to give pleasure to others. Pleasure can be given to others by thoughtfulness, by kindness, by various generousities; but in the long run thoughtfulness, etc., tend to pall, since they are acts of grace, and do not create *bonhomie*. If all the benefactions are upon one side, or if retaliatory benefactions are made out of a sense of duty ('She gave me this, so I must give *her* something'), love suffers a strain. Whereas those who are pleased with themselves are, as it were, broadcasting benefactions which are so little obvious that the return is made instinctively. The beam in the smile of our friends is a beam of light. Its refractions are innumerable, and are not to be calculated in number or extent. All we know is that our hearts are eased and our spirits raised, and the true cause of our happiness is this pervasive sense of pleasure, which is the truest charm against care and constraint that man has yet discovered.



## TACT

TOWARDS the end of last century, a popular novelist described the receipt by his heroine of a letter from her lover. The lover, as was at that time quite proper, in novels, was doing his best to forward the suit of a rival, under the impression that the rival was favoured; and his letter was not really very perilous stuff. But the lady who received it slipped the thing first, unopened, into her pocket, and then, after reading, into the bosom of her dress. 'This,' said our author, 'this she did somewhat hurriedly because her mother was on the stairs; and with quick—what shall we say?—*tact*, remained motionless while Mrs. Valliant passed the open door. Again I must repeat that there was no surreptitiousness in her thoughts or movements. A little concealment, a little dissimulation, and a little falsehood are necessary if human beings wish to live together in anything like harmony.'

I quote this passage from a sixty-year old novel with no intention of drawing a moral from it, although I would direct the reader's attention to a change which has occurred of late years in the relations of mothers and daughters. When Henry Seton Merriman wrote *The Phantom Future*, no doubt mothers were more inquisitive about their daughters' correspondence than they are allowed to be at present. In 1888, perhaps, Mrs. Valliant might have said: 'You have a letter, my child? Show mother. . . .' She could no longer with propriety, or with the expectation of an answer, ask such a question, or make such a demand. Alas! It is the mothers, nowadays, who have to be tactful.

But indeed, 'concealment,' 'dissimulation,' and 'falsehood' are harsh words to use in explanation of the word 'tact.' Tact is a delicacy, an imaginative perception of what is fit, pleasing, acceptable. It involves no lie. Or, when it is the vehicle by which a lie is carried, it is generally quite charming in itself, and can be separated from the lie as being altogether blameless and without guile. And, in order to be itself, tact *must* be unobtrusive. The sight of a consciously tactful person in action is horrifying. A person who 'changes the conversation,' for example; or one across whose face an expression of mysterious sanctity passes as a difficult corner is negotiated; a hostess who smiles frozenly at a broken unmatchable plate, and who says in a hollow voice, 'It's only an old thing John picked up at a sale'—all these are, to me, not really tactful creatures at all. They think they are tactful. But it is one thing to be tactful, and quite another to think one is being tactful. Is the distinction clear? The one is a sympathy; the other is a performance.

I am sometimes inclined to believe that the finest tact of all is unconscious. I have seen a very little girl go up to another strange little girl who was frightened and weeping, and take her reassuringly by the hand. To me, that seemed the perfection of impulsive tact, showing quick understanding and immediate kindness. Not a word passed; but the weeping child began at once to smile, clutching the friendly hand in gratitude. Such tact in setting strangers at ease is highly valued in hostesses. It is a rare quality. When it is present, visitors are no longer conscious that they are visitors. They are at home, and all the more at home because they have no sense of responsibility, such as they would feel in their own surroundings.

Nothing need be carefully said by the hostess. She has not to be elaborately 'tactful,' or breezy, or talkative. She has not to dress like a slattern in order to show that her house is 'Liberty Hall.' She has not to assure all her visitors that they

are to 'make themselves at home,' and 'throw their cigarette ash anywhere except into the ash-trays.' But she must not instinctively *not mind* having mud upon her carpets, fingerprints upon her white paint, tea or wine stains upon her tablecloths; and she must be so much mistress of herself that her guests behave with a similar absence of self-consciousness, both in face of disaster and in face of complete lack of exciting interest. And the more they marvel—afterwards—at the happiness of their visit, the more will the guests pay tribute, possibly unawares, to the tact of the mistress of the house. A creaking paraphernalia of tactful speeches and silences, watchfulness (however hospitable), and laboured brightness under strain, will invariably cow guests or make them nervously ebullient. But it will not prevent them from giving a sigh of relief when they reach home. 'Did you enjoy yourself, dear?' the visitor may be asked by her mother. 'Yes, thanks'; the reply will be listless. 'It doesn't sound as if you had done so.' 'Well, mother; Ethel's kind and good. . . . It's horribly ungrateful. . . . But she's so jolly tactful all the time that you feel you're walking on eggs. . . .' 'Pooh,' says the mother. 'It's not tact at all, if you can see it. It's a blanket, and a wet one.'

Nor is it. Some regard flattery as tactful. They say: 'How well that hat suits you! What a charming frock!' and the verdict may be sincere or insincere. Generally it is insincere, because the perfect clothing inspires no comment, but, instead, defies it. The young man who is—shall we say?—*liked* well enough to be valued as a connoisseur (though his judgment may be grotesque, and may be perfectly well known to be grotesque) may be complimented by companionship in a glorious turn-out, to which much thought has been given, and even much candle-light busy needlework. He may be subjected to scrutiny by the wearer of the turn-out, may be apparently unaware of the compliment that has been paid him, and may at last be questioned as to his true opinion

regarding the uncommended dress. If he is tactless, he may blunder into a thousand extravagances of language, a series of explanations and lies of great magnitude, from a yearning to express strong but unexamined emotion or approval. But a tactful young man, speaking from his heart, may say 'I love you,' and the world will be changed for both the *costumière* and himself.

Upon the other hand, he may use those same words upon another occasion, when they are inappropriate, and may arouse impatience, and even anger. Having had one stupefying success with the phrase, he may use it as a catchword. He may employ the wrong tone, laughingly, solemnly, bluntly, stupidly; and he will gain nothing by his speech. Because the essence of tact is its *justesse*. If it is not exactly right, it is all wrong. If it is natural and beautiful, it arises from the heart. It is the fruit of intimate imagination, which is the power to feel what other persons feel. It is an intuitive power, which only the imaginative can possess.

By large numbers of people, imagination is confused with poetic invention. The more grandiose a poet's conception is, the more imaginative it is supposed to be. Nothing could be more false. The imagination of the poet is shown in his power to create the replica of his vision so intensely as to give his readers something akin to his own experience. He has *felt* so strongly, that we are able to feel with similar strength. The power of the novelist, although less sublime than that of the poet, resembles it to this extent, that what he describes must have been seen and felt with such vividness as to convince and absorb us. He must, that is, have put himself in the place of each character, in each scene, so that we, in reading what he has written, make the same imaginative excursion into other hearts and other minds. The tactful person is, according to my view, third in the scale of imaginative creatures. The tactful person *imagines* those with whom she has to deal. She instinctively puts herself into their bones, their

flesh, their surroundings; and tact is the result. A failure in tact is a failure in imagination.

There must not be any confusion between tact and tactics. Tact has nothing to do with the hiding of letters, with the telling of monstrous lies, with dissimulation. These offences against sincerity and mutual understanding are tactics. I have a friend—one of the best of men—who uses tactics and calls them tact. He has innumerable good qualities and he has one weakness. He loves to spend his Saturday afternoons watching the play of a famous London Rugby football club. His wife does not share his affection for this particular form of pastime. This is perfectly well understood between them. They love each other dearly, but they differ as to the best way of spending Saturday afternoon. At all other times of the year, my friend (the husband) is amenable to his wife's plan for the day; but during the Rugby football season he becomes a tactician. He once described to me what happened. He said: 'During lunch I say, carelessly, "Is there anything you want specially to do this afternoon?" *She* looks at me, and says, "Well, I thought we'd turn out the spare bedroom. . . ." And I say, grudgingly: "Oh, . . . oh, all right. . . ." *She* says, "Did you want . . .?" And I say: "Oh, no, it doesn't matter." *She* says, "You wanted to go to football?" And I say: "Yes; but it doesn't matter. . . ." And I whistle a bit, and say: "When shall we start?" But in the depths of my black heart, I know that I shall go to the football. . . . That's *tact*.'

I hope that no reader will assume my friend to be a hideously selfish man. No selfish man would ever be expected—even vainly—by a wife in her right mind to assist in turning out the spare bedroom on a Saturday afternoon. He is not as a rule selfish. But in this one matter he is without conscience. Where he is wrong, however, is in his definition of tact. He shows himself, in the scene I have described to be a strategist, as he plans a campaign and offers battle upon ground which he has chosen; or a chess-player, as he risks



that initial sacrifice which in chess is called a gambit. But if any tact at all is shown in this reported conversation, it is by the wife; because by her handling of a lost battle she withdraws from the field with the honours, giving the husband great cause to love her and to appreciate his freedom. The failure in her tact lies in the confession that she had had other plans for the afternoon. The perfectly tactful woman has no formulated plan. She imaginatively perceives the desires of others, and, out of her goodwill, gratifies them.

But there is a tact of emergency which I must not omit to mention. This is the tact required in the answering of direct personal questions. It also is needed when some fresh object is unexpectedly produced and a declaration upon it is unavoidable. A young friend of mine, seeing for the first time her sister's youngest child, was deeply impressed with the baby's large and placid calm. She said, enthusiastically: 'Why, he's not like a baby at all. He's like a beautiful white calf!' It was agreed that her exclamation was not tactful, but the exact remark to be made—of course, upon the spur of the moment—upon any young baby is a severe problem in tact. One needs, perhaps, to be expert in these matters to say the right word. Otherwise, one may be in the position of Smee, in *Peter Pan*, who 'can't think of a *thing*.' The tactful person knows what to say, knows whether to speak of beauty, or character, size, splendour, or resemblance.

Or there is the direct question. Most of us have been shown a picture or some piece of writing, some embroidery, created by an incompetent person. Most of us have seen the anxious eyes of the petitioner. 'Is it really any good! D'you like it?' 'My dear child, it's *terrible*!' How can we say that? And yet, how can we leave it to others to say? Others more brutal, and less timid than ourselves. 'You know, I'm not like other people. I want the *truth*.' 'You are *just* like other people. You want the pleasant truth. Besides, who am I to say that this thing is bad?' It is at such a moment that tact

becomes invaluable, for what is needed is not so much a lie as the proper phrase. The tactful person can say, 'Well, I don't think it's really very good, because I can't quite see what it means,' and can somehow triumph in the midst of candour. The pseudo-tactful person can say, 'Yes, by Jove; charming! Yes, that *is* charming. Excellent! Excellent! What a clever little witch!' and for all his pseudo-tact can send the artist away depressed and resentful.

'Do you love your husband?' asks Miss Tactless. 'He's a most deserving man,' answers the self-contained wife. But Madame Tact, arriving later, will hear the whole story. 'I told him I *hated* him,' says the young wife. 'You *do* think I am right, *don't* you!' Such a question it is beyond the power of most of us to answer; but if Madame Tact can see both sides there may be a reconciliation without embarrassment. 'Do you like Agatha? She's such a stunning girl!' demands and asserts the youth. 'So I've always found her!' answers Tactless. But Tact will resist criticism and maintain self-respect. 'She's certainly a most impressive hockey-player....'

How is it done? One knows that it is done by adroitness; but, to be perfect tact, the adroitness must spring from love and comprehension, and it must hold truth. It is quite possible for the tactful person to signify truth regarding a poor artistic performance without discouraging the artist. I have seen artists handled so delicately that they have retired, full of confidence, to destroy poor work and to create better. It is quite possible to convey to young wives (and young husbands) that they have sometimes been hasty and inconsiderate, without accusin<sup>g</sup> them of folly and selfishness, and without forfeiting their regard. It is even possible—though it is difficult—to express a truthful opinion of the racketing hoyden Agatha. Many mothers have to do this sort of thing every day of their lives; and yet they keep the love of their sons through any number of similar disagreements. The tactless

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ones muddle the business; but the tactful ones are invariably triumphant.

It is because they have sensitiveness, love, imagination, and elasticity of mind. No rigidity is permissible in the tactful. No determination to speak the truth at all costs to others. No vehemence of prejudice. No loss of nerve. No egotism. No relapses at crucial moments into humourlessness or facetiousness. Instead, a moderation of judgment, a power of quick adjustment to situation and to other natures. A sympathy and understanding capable of enduring great strain. A sincerity that inspires confidence. A capacity to withdraw from the limelight and do good deeds by stealth. Above all, great common sense in worldly affairs, and a great absence of it in all that pertains to the spirit. As I have said, tact is nothing more nor less than applied imagination—applied, that is, in a manner not wholly different from that of the poet and the novelist; but applied to the actual, intimate moment instead of to the creations of the artist's myth-making faculty. It is not easy to be tactful; but those who love unselfishly have taken the first and essential step; for they have learned how much happiness is to be gained by the exploration and discovery of other natures than their own.

## ON FEELING INFERIOR

MOST of us at one time or another have noticed and disliked noisy people in restaurants, or those who push past us upon the roadway, or who are rude in conversation. We have noticed these people, and thought them ugly and unpleasant; but we have not always understood what is the matter with them. The cause of their misbehaviour is really that they feel inferior, and are trying to bluster us into the belief that they are much better than they look. This is why a deformed or undersized person is so frequently conceited. He feels that unless he draws attention to himself he will be ignored. In the same way, a man who has not been fortunate enough to receive education as a child, but who by superior ability or by happy chance attains unexpected wealth, may often be more conscious of his lack of social polish than he need be. He will speak in a loud voice, and will hector, because he wishes to prove that he is 'somebody.' This is a mistake, but it is a natural mistake. The parvenu does not realize that we are all so busy thinking of our own affairs that we have little enough attention to give to others. He thinks all eyes are upon him, all tongues wagging in comment upon him. He is like Mr. Salteena, in *The Young Visitors*, who wrote: 'I am not quite a gentleman but you would hardly notice it but can't be helped anyhow'; and he hopes that if he talks loud and is rude to the waiters, his lack of gentility will be obscured by what he conceives to be the normal deportment of an hereditary peer. But just as Mr. Salteena announced his imperfect gentility with some defiance, thus showing that

it worried him, so our friend has a great deal of bravado; and while he tries to behave like a lord, he at the same time seeks to show that he is a self-made man, and therefore much to be preferred to any lord in the land.

Not all self-made men have this vulgar noisiness, of course; but few of them ever feel absolutely at home in the company of those born to luxury. Some of them manage very well, and do not allow themselves to make any display; but a good many are otherwise. They ape the manners of the blue-blooded, or they decry them. The consciously inferior man finds fault with the highly-bred, but in their company he is so complaisant as to be unnatural. He is like a shopkeeper rubbing his hands and bowing out the lords and ladies who have honoured him with a visit. Yet when the lords and ladies are gone, he is extraordinarily severe in his judgment of them. He ridicules their manners and their morals, and makes game of their intellects, until one feels that the whole scene just concluded must have been a singular dream. It has been no dream, but it has been singular enough. Why, you ask, if he so dislikes and despises these people, does he condescend to mix with them; why, having condescended, is he so obsequious? And why, having been obsequious, does he now abuse and make game of those who have been so lately the objects of his humility? There is only one explanation. This man has a vivid memory of his childhood, of his mean birth, of all the advantages of the 'gentry.' He remembers squalid years of poverty and wretchedness, when pennies were scarce and when life was hard. He follows in memory those rough schooldays, the severe work that followed them, the gradually increasing rewards; and the sense of them is ingrained in him. He has emerged from these horrors, and has attained some wealth and some position in the world.

He has, perhaps, servants, automobiles, town and country houses, the society of the wealthy and the distinguished; and in the eyes of most ambitious young men he would be con-

sidered to have reached an ideal estate. It is not so. He is not content. He is still severely troubled about himself and those with whom his pleasant lot is now cast. The reason of his discontent is plain. Having stepped outside the life he has always known, he is of no world at all. He is at a disadvantage. He is at home nowhere. When he meets those who have been accustomed all their lives to the comfort which he can now for the first time buy, he recognizes that his experience is different from theirs. He may despise the men he now meets, and find them by his standards of endurance soft and degenerate; but he envies them their social ease. He realizes that their authority comes from the deference to which they have all their life been used; he knows that his own special branch of work is outside the capacity of most of them; but he is dissatisfied. Because it is not in work that there is any true class feeling. Work is for the most part outside class. It is in play and pleasure that class offers greater scope for distinctions. And it is in pleasure that the man who has 'arrived' meets with his stabbing pain of inferiority. He has never learned to do the things, to play the games and talk the talk, which come naturally to these men and women whom he now meets. Grimly, he may say to himself, 'Let them try and do my work'; but in his heart he knows that he feels inferior to those he despises.

He is inferior, in social polish. To him, the performance of certain acts of courtesy or feats of dexterity is a difficult matter. To these others, it is a matter of course. But to them the acts are, through custom, so negligible, that the fortunate brethren have no feeling of superiority comparable to our friend's feeling of inferiority. They are more or less ready to accept him for what he is, a man of outstanding skill and character, and to waive any claim to better breeding. It is in fact a part of their breeding, this easy affability. If they betray class feeling, it is less through complacency (although that is an obvious explanation of it) than through some individual

consciousness of inferiority to him whom they patronize. Feeling inferior to him in ability, they might seek to adjust the difference between them by reminding him of a difference in birth and education. But this sort of thing is rare. Snobbery only begins when other claims to quality fail, when a sense of personal inadequacy is so revealed as to be unbearable. In the minds of sweet do-nothings there is nowadays much admiration for the man who can show that he has 'done' something. They admire, they respect. Their mutual glances at a gaucherie, which so mortify the newcomer, are not always the ribaldries that he suspects. At times these glances are startled. At times it may occur to the dilettanti to wonder why it is that they have had so much ease, while others—so much more deserving, as their sense of inferiority proclaims, have had nothing of it. They are uncomfortable. At such a thought as this they will quickly feel contempt for their own failures and futilities, their own vagueness of mind and purpose, their wasted time and their absorption in trivial things. They will still admire, but with the instinctive hostility which arises from damaged self-esteem. This that the newcomer has done, they will feel, is the true use of life; and themselves they will regard as shadows, born of idleness and fancy.

It is all a matter of habit and custom. If you put Dresden china into the hands of a carpenter, and set him in a cushioned boudoir, he will be so embarrassed that he will glower or grin at his hostess, and perhaps drop the cup. Put that same hostess into the home of a poor woman, with a hard day's housework to do, then, be she never so willing, never so skilled in entertaining princes and princesses, in moving behind political scenes and directing a household of servants, she will feel alarmed and incapable. She will suffer as much as the carpenter has done from a sense of unfitness, of inferiority. She may carry matters off better, because she is better trained in *savoir-faire*, but she will be just as uncomfortable.

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But indeed men and women are very prone to take a desperate view of their own qualities. They meet disaster almost with anxious eagerness. It is only what they have expected, they say. In a fix, they at first cry out. Only later do they set themselves to learn a new condition of life. Would that all such problems were as slight and as small as this one of social adjustment! There are other, more serious, grave aspects of the disease. There is often a consciousness, and more often a delusive conviction, of moral inferiority; and this it is almost impossible to cure. Set a minx against a good girl, and the minx will misbehave worse than ever. She will envy the good girl, and feel inferior to her; she will persuade herself that the good girl is a prig, and will try to form alliances against the good girl. If there are young men in the party, she will appropriate the one in whom she believes the good girl to take an interest. She will exaggerate her conversation for the purpose of shocking; she will be driven to all sorts of excesses of manner and conduct and all because she feels inferior to the good girl. If the good girl be a very good girl indeed, she may expect the minx presently to make explosive confession to her. The minx will be contrite, will abuse herself, resolve to be good, will grow for a time demure. But in the end nature will be too strong for both of them. Temptation will assail the minx, and the good girl's goodness will be too much for her. The two girls will draw apart. The minx will no longer take active steps to destroy the good girl; but she will not thereafter very actively protest against any criticism of the good girl. If the good girl fail at any sport, if she be less pretty than the minx, or if she be an inferior dancer, then candour (or perhaps the sense of inferiority) will lead the minx to enjoy news of this. She will titter, will laugh; and will rejoice in the inference that dispraise of the good girl means praise of herself. She will think other people deceived as to their respective merits. She will not cease to envy the good girl. She will not cease to be irked by her own sense of



inferiority. As for the good girl, she will be a good girl in virtue of the fact that she feels she has nothing to write home about, and does not mind that.

Go beyond the minx, to those more deeply committed to pleasures that besmirch character. It is a commonplace that a man who drinks excessively is at all times a dangerous influence for one who does not drink at all or who drinks in moderation only. He will not agree to follow his own course and allow his companion to go another way. No. His one object—and the heavy drinker has extraordinary ingenuities in the art of temptation and cajolery—will be to make his companion more drunk than himself. To that end, he will be spider-like. He will set the trap, and watch it, as those people do in books and plays who seek to drug hero or heroine in order to steal their jewels or secret papers. He will unobtrusively fill and refill the glass, ever watching. And if he triumph once, he will never again take his foot from within the open door. He will be ever ready with sneer and suggestion, until his malice is further gratified. In these cases the ingenuity is not used to secure company for the carouse. It is to destroy a moral superiority. It is due to the intolerable sense of being inferior. The feeling of inferiority is thus shown to be an active and malignant force, and not a merely negligible product of inexperience.

But of course the dipsomaniac is a rare instance. He cannot long be attractive, because the very character of his disease renders him disagreeable. The minx may persist longer, and may do much harm and cause much unhappiness. In her case a single event may change her outlook and create confidence. She may yet come to look kindly upon good girls and good men, instead of regarding with the abhorrence of envy. On the other hand, she may go on being a minx until the end of her life. I fancy minxes grow rather colourless in middle life, and sit at suburban windows or at literary tea-parties, making up stories about the good.

And the good? They are the wise. The wise man is like the good girl. He eats his food as best he may, wears his clothes as they come, forgets his hands, admits that there are many things he cannot do, and believes that if his friends like him they will pardon his transgressions. He feels, not so much inferior, as fortunate, and not so much fortunate, as happy. His rewards are immeasurable. The good girl, as one would expect, is even better than the wise man, because she is more clever. She contrives to do right upon every occasion, and by her freedom from affectation and spleen to make happy even those who suffer from the inferiority complex. She has fathomed the whole truth, that the sense of inferiority is just self-consciousness gone rancid. The school-boy hates his new suit, and the debutante walks gingerly. Always the stranger is ill-at-ease. But in reality the boy knows and thinks more of his creaking collar and his board-like new suit than anybody else; the eyes of all are less upon the debutante than her beating heart leads her to suppose; and the stranger has not to encounter such venom or uncharitableness as he takes for granted. How do we feel ourselves when another person is uncomfortable? Do we not do our best to help cover the trouble? We may do it, indeed, very poorly; but our impulse is there. Other people are very like ourselves. They are shy and well meaning. They wish to be liked in spite of their failings. They want to please and to be pleased. And if they are natural, our hearts are very friendly towards them, in spite of all we have heard of their virtues or their faults. In the same way the stranger I have supposed above (he may be the kindest of men at heart, although his manners are brusque and his appearance grotesque) should rely upon the good-nature of others. There is really no time in this life to do anything else. Instead, too often, he scents patronage or the piercing scrutiny of the cruel, miraculously informed (which they never are) of his lack of breeding, his quarrelsomeness, his moral delinquencies, and his shady doings in

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the busy world. He blusters, to show that he is as good as we are; or brags, to show that he is better. But if he really believed himself as good as we are he would not bluster; and if he really believed himself better there would be no need to brag. And so he is annoying us superfluously through his absurd sense of inferiority, like a person who will apologize in spite of every effort at forgiveness, or one who insists upon explaining at length something which we already understand better than he does. It is a social disease that he suffers from, and a very inconvenient one. I fear it is incurable.

## ON GIVING WAY TO THINGS

TO wake up in the morning with the merry songs of birds filling the air; to have a clear and expectant mind, full of eagerness as to the day's happenings; to enjoy one's bath (with or without song, according to one's temperament); and to embark upon the adventure of another dozen hours or so full of zealous labour—that is happiness. To awaken cloudy-witted, heavy-eyed; to be irritated by the metallic chirping of creatures that are never silent; to feel a draught; to be bored by breakfast; to feel neuralgic or headachy; to have to hurry for a train or endure the tedious discomforts of a house which one loathes; to plan meals and execute disagreeable tasks with a sinking heart and a resentful spirit—that is misery. It is no wonder that those who awaken cheerful are able to continue cheerful; and perhaps it is not surprising that those who open their eyes to find the whole world a distress are apt to be snappy, gloomy, sour, and disagreeable for as long as they continue to feel the hopeless exasperation of the dyspeptic. We can all sympathize (in theory) with those who are ill or unhappy; but when we, having done no wrong, are snubbed and snarled at, when we meet thankless and lugubrious glances from them, it is more difficult to view such misery with calm. First our own tempers are clouded, and our spirits chilled; and then, possibly, we also give way to retaliatory irritation. It is at this point that the ever-lurking little devils of wrong and quarrelsomeness dash in and turn our company awry. In the days of fairy tales, Robin Good-fellow might have been blamed, or spell-weaving godmothers,

or witches. At the present time we know, or should know that we have only ourselves to blame for every mishap. We have given way to things. It is a common failing.

There are those who can be teased out of ill-temper there are those whom teasing makes entirely sore and bear-like. The former we love, and the latter we shake our heads over. These are the ones who habitually give way to things. We see no reason why we should be punished for their misfortunes. We have not caused these misfortunes, or contributed to them. We ourselves—at the beginning of the coil of trouble—are probably cheerful enough; yet doors are banged, silence is carefully exaggerated, little jerkings of the head and hands and looks of active dislike are the reward we earn for our most unobtrusive pleasantnesses or withdrawals; and finally we are left in a state of mind of beaten dogs, while the sufferer, triumphant in gloom, stalks from our presence consumed with hatred for us.

He (or she) has given way to misery. As easily, he (or she) may give way to joy. It may be our turn to feel a little wretched the following morning; whereas the sufferer of yesterday is gay with good sleep. Then, the bangs and crashes are not those of rage, but of exuberant spirits. The house will ring with stentorian song from dining-room or bathroom. Wild gaiety of movement and address will take the place of glum silence. Once more, our friend has given way to things. If it is a man, he will troll blithely, bring mud into the house, tramp and be noisy, as if there could be only delight in the whole world. If it is a woman, she will whisk about the rooms, and untie parcels, scattering their wrappers, shaking out the contents of the parcels, exclaiming at their beauty, dancing and talking very vivaciously the while. She has given way to her mood of happiness as energetically as she had the other day given way to her mood of finding all things cruel and repulsive. She will sing, laugh, jump. And, perhaps having talked and laughed until she is excited, she will give

way to tears. This will probably be the last straw, and we ourselves will either give way to tears in turn or will take to flight. On the whole I think flight is best, because from tears our friend may presently return either to laughter or to moroseness, and in either case the consequences to ourselves will be unwelcome or alarming. They cannot be pleasant.

A man will not usually give way to tears unless he is very hungry; but he may give way to many other things. He may give way to all sorts of displeasing habits, and is very much inclined, among other habits, to give way to the impulse to tyrannize. This, if it is persisted in, and remains unchecked, is a very bad form of giving way, because it means that there is no possibility of recovery in the patients. It is equally bad for a woman to give way to tyrannic impulse, but plain tyranny is a less common form in women than in men. In women tyranny is more apt to work through tears, headaches, weakness, self-blame, self-pity, and valetudinarianism. Worst of all, perhaps, through a despair of herself. However, it can be exercised in other ways also, as anybody who knows a home presided over by a harsh and determined maiden, wife, mother, or ancient servant well knows. All giving way to the tyrannic impulse is disgusting, and in the very young, before it is properly established, this impulse should be quelled.

A very hard-working youth whom I once knew was deeply attracted to an emotional girl. He one evening took his friend to a theatre. On the journey thither, being very happy, recalling some grief unconnected with her swain which had not been in her mind earlier, she horrified the young man by giving way to tears, publicly, in the middle of the Strand. Her cavalier was eyed by every passer with anger and contempt. Men clenched their fists, but fortunately refrained from shaking them; women, immediately guessing at a wrong to their sex, cast resentful glances at the cruel evoker of these tears. The observers were all like the celebrated lady,

who told her friend: 'I didn't *say* much; but I thought to myself "*Oh!*"' The girl who was the cause of the young man's punishment presently dried her tears, entered the theatre with him, and gave way to extremities of laughter. She resembled another young woman who lately explained unnecessary tears upon this ground: 'I'm so emotional,' she said, as though the power to weep were an accomplishment.

But tears—however distressing to the male—are more forgivable than sulkiness; and sulkiness is a habit common to both sexes of those who give way to things. Sulkiness and bad temper. Bad temper, vented upon the innocent, seems to me to be unwarrantable. It is such a liberty. It illustrates an assumption that we have the right to make others share our discomforts and our moods. Of course I know that it is only the ideal human being who does not at times yield to misery or temper; but quite ordinary people manage through pride or good-nature to control a vicious mood of wretchedness. Assuming that they have headaches, or feel poorly; assuming that they have experienced a shock or a misfortune; they mention the fact to those whom it immediately concerns, do not parade the ill, and so, shortly, recover.

The individual who gives way to things does not explicitly mention his or her ailments, but leaves their existence to be inferred from his or her outrageous behaviour. Mr. Marigold, for example, will dislike the breakfast which Mrs. Marigold has provided for him, or will resent having been kept waiting for it. Instead of realizing that what has happened is a misfortune, he will regard it as a personal wrong. He will scowl at his wife, will address no words to her during the melancholy meal, will leave the house banging the front door, and will hurry to the railway station. His collar will irk him, and his hat. The heat of temper will conspire with the heat produced by rapid motion to make him feverishly annoyed. He will grow more and more angry and ill-used.

All the time he is waiting for his train he will be thinking:

'It's always like this. She's always late . . . always gives me this breakfast. . . . She *knows* I have to leave punctually at half-past. . . . Always the same. Whatever I want is never done. *She* likes kedjeree—or likes it cold. She's got all day to sit about the house, doing nothing. *I've* got to go out, whether I like it or not. . . . Tight collar. . . . Train's late again. I've got that infernal Tomkinson coming at eleven. . . . Smith to lunch. It's sickening! She's . . . ' And so his mind dwells upon a number of Mrs. Marigold's other delinquencies. They fly to his recollection. They mount intoxicatingly to his brain. Mrs. Marigold becomes the most perverse of her sex. She becomes weak, dilatory, selfish, exasperating. Her faults are infuriating. They are innumerable.

At the office, when he reaches it, Mr. Marigold stalks with black glances past his clerks or his subordinates. He feels them raise their eyebrows and sign to each other that his behaviour is eccentric. He hates them all. Little Offord is there, waiting with some document. 'What's this?' almost shouts Mr. Marigold. 'It's all wrong! What's that? But I tell you it *is* wrong. Go and get me the book. . . . ' And if Mr. Offord happens to be right, Mr. Marigold hates him more strenuously than ever. He schemes to dismiss Offord from his employment. Mr. Offord is inefficient, impertinent. . . . What a lot of fools surround Mr. Marigold! They are all idiots—obstinate, weak, dilatory, exasperating. Only Mr. Marigold—poor persecuted Mr. Marigold—is perfect; and Mr. Marigold is at every turn hampered by the incompetence of others.

Comes Mr. Tomkinson at eleven o'clock. Mr. Tomkinson is mulish, and self-complacent; it is impossible to make him understand common sense. It is impossible to do business with him. Mr. Marigold begins to resent Mr. Tomkinson's peculiarities. Mr. Tomkinson has his thin hair brushed in straight lines across his skull in order to hide his baldness. . . . He is a fool. Smith is no better. The lunch with Smith is



a boredom. Mr. Marigold's one satisfaction is that to each of these torments he has administered some sharp verbal cuffs. His impulse to be savage to them all increases with every hour. He detests them, and desires to wound each one of them according to his stronger vanity.

The day wears away, and Mr. Marigold, clearing his throat, strides out of the office in the evening to go home. He frowns over his evening paper. He enters the house frowning, feeling that he would like to kick everything that is in the house. Unless Mrs. Marigold is superbly tactful, her husband (who by this time—unknown to himself—is very tired of being angry and is longing to be reconciled with her) will spend the evening heavily disagreeable in mood, and will stamp off to bed without so much as a pleasant inquiry after his wife's health.

If Mrs. Marigold is the excellent woman one supposes her to be (for who ever heard of two married people who are both in the habit of giving way to things?), she will have felt slightly hurt during the breakfast hour; she will have reproached herself for lateness or the bad breakfast, will have laughed, will have prepared or caused to be prepared the dinner which Mr. Marigold prefers to all other meals in the cook's repertoire. This meal will be exactly punctual. It will be perfect. It will be so good that when Mr. Marigold has finished eating he will be soothed and benignant. He *may* want to ask pardon for the sins of the day. He may give way to remorse. . . .

That would be worst of all; but Mrs. Marigold will have risked it, and if she is the skilful woman we think her, Mr. Marigold will feel no remorse, but will suppose that he disguised his feelings in the morning with complete success. Mrs. Marigold will take all blame. This will not really deceive Mr. Marigold at all; but he will be grateful, and gratitude may work wonders.

But supposing Mrs. Marigold also is one who gives way to

things? I need hardly picture her, after the first departure of her husband, sitting disconsolately in her lonely breakfast-room, thinking of her wrongs at the same time that Mr. Marigold is thinking of *his*. I need hardly describe how she snaps at her servants, how she grows colder and more morose during the day, how her throat contracts, how she finds fault with everything that is done—pulls the curtains fiddlingly in order to make them set as they should do and can never do, rearranges and dusts the objects which have just been dusted and arranged, blames a discouraged maid for leaving a heap of dust under the settee or for chipping a favourite vase, quarrels with her cook, rebukes the gardener, snubs and insults her shopkeepers, and an errand-boy who whistles and cellar-flaps while waiting the return of his basket. . . . She, like the lower servants described by Sir James Barrie's hero, 'The Admirable Crichton,' having herself suffered, proceeds to adjust matters by 'taking it out of the odds and ends.' A whole day in the lives of the Marigolds and their dependants has been spoilt. The Marigolds have given way to things.

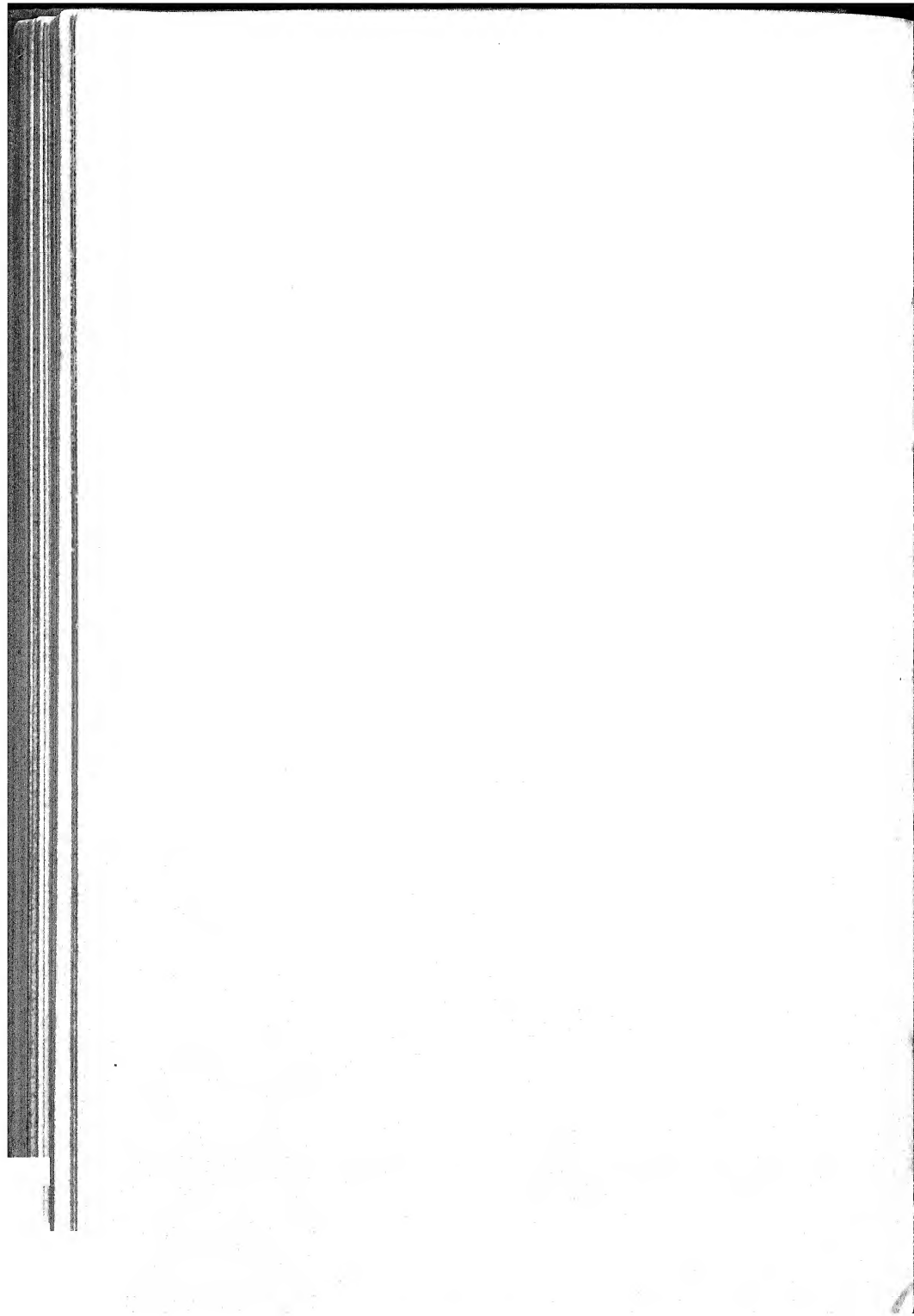
What right have they to give way? None whatever. We none of us have any right to give way to things. Insignificant links as we are in the great chain of human lives, we are so much involved with others that we cannot afford to give way. If we do so, we punish those who are subordinate to us, or those who cannot escape from our society. Divorce is not yet granted in this country upon the ground of persistent ill-temper; and our married partners are the nearest sufferers. Our domestic servants can leave us, it is true; but we do not (nowadays) wish them to leave us, if they happen to be good servants. Accordingly, we must be careful not to give way to things too vehemently in their presence. But clerks and shopkeepers and smaller fry are not so irreplaceable; and this many men and women instinctively know, so that they allow themselves to be rude, ill-tempered, brusque, and insulting

to their clerks and other employees. They can do this with impunity, for if a clerk gives way to his feelings in his or her turn, the clerk can be discharged; and if the gardener's boy or the milkman or the sewing-woman gives way, there may be disaster immediately ahead for the offender. But the really cowardly and wicked thing about giving way is that by giving way we can only punish those who love us and those who dare not quarrel with us. Our superiors and even our equals—unless they are bound by ties of relationship—we may alienate by any ill-temper; and we are too reliant upon them to risk their displeasure. We ourselves shun the ill-tempered; and the same is true of most other human beings. Therefore we are careful not to give way in the company of those whose respect we value, or whose disdain we fear.

Further, all people have their trials, their petty illnesses and irritations. Some—the majority—believe or instinctively know that they have no right to pass on, by way of ill-temper, whatever grievances they may feel in the course of the day. They remain good-tempered in spite of headaches; a quarrel with one person, however much it may disturb them, does not affect their behaviour to another. In a word, these people *do not* give way to things. The temptation to do so is no doubt in their hearts. They, also, recall our older faults when we offend afresh. But such recollections are dismissed. They are not dwelt upon. Set aside, evil memories are powerless. Even a cold breakfast, or a late one, can be explained, can be excused. So can lateness for an appointment. So can mistakes, thoughtlessnesses, exuberant cheerfulness, and the like. These things, trivial enough, are all occasions for explosive giving way. But it is necessary that the explanations should be made possible by good temper. It is necessary that we should be able to listen to explanations. Above all, it is imperative that we should realize how dependent we really are upon the good-nature and affection of other people. Only so shall we come to appreciate that by

ON GIVING WAY TO THINGS

giving way to things we are offending against an essential social convention. This is, that our very ability to punish others for faults which they have not committed imposes an obligation upon us. We must not 'take it out of the odds and ends.' Rather, we must master ourselves, husbanding our temper for worthy occasions, when its display will be creditable and salutary.



## RESPECTABILITY

IT has always been the object of the English to be respectable. Not only to appear so (this is the charge frequently brought against us by bewildered Continental observers), but really to *be* respectable. We want to do right, and to have our rightness admitted by all save a few stimulating outsiders. It is nothing less than a passion. Even to-day, when—if we believe our eyes and the correspondence columns of the newspapers—so much is being done which the good must disapprove, the hearts of all the rebels are secretly craving respectability. For it is as true now as it has always been that the way of transgressors is hard, and the worst misery of human beings is the loss of self-respect and the respect of others. For this reason the game of sin is never worth while. If one wishes to live in amity with other people (in England, at any rate) one has incessantly to consider their feelings and their opinions. The penalty of misdemeanour may no longer be ostracism (so far we have advanced in the arts of toleration); but it is at least the gift of a reputation for being eccentric. Such a gift is quite as great a deterrent from evil-doing as the summary fiat of old. To some natures, indeed, it is more deadly yet. One cannot, nowadays, do odd things without being considered odd, and even a social rebel hates to be considered odd. To give a shock—that is quite pleasant. To have one's sanity doubted, or one's conduct ridiculed by sharp wits, is unendurable. Which among us can bear to be laughed at? And yet, in every case of social defiance that I know, when the performer, often an egoist of the first water,

is filled with the pride of his or her own defiance, the rebel's act has effectively occasioned ridicule and the imputation of slight insanity. The cause of this disaster to calculated defiance is possibly that we have become a larger brotherhood, since these methods are recognizably those practised in large families, where nothing, not even defiance, is sacred. Or it may arise from the instinctive common sense of the law-loving English, who in general are not much disturbed by defiance, and consider it a mark of mere impudence or childish extravagance.

The English send representatives to the ends of the earth, but when they go there these representatives at once set up an English colony, and live wherever they find themselves in as nearly the correct manner of the middle-class at home as an unfamiliar climate will allow. I know of one famous explorer who never travelled in the jungle without his full evening-dress, tail-coat, white tie, and all, because, he said, one never knew when one might need it. Sometimes, of course, he may have worn it to impress the aborigines; but on the whole I think his eye was in this matter directed elsewhere. He must have found in his journeyings many of these sedately English middle-class colonies which I have mentioned. Members of them are in all ways as conventional as those less enterprising individuals who stay for ever in England. And, as a French writer once pointed out in regard to the English, their government by opinion, which produces political liberty, at the same time is inclined to produce social sadness. You will find the same degree of nicety of manners and etiquettes in such colonies as at home. There, as here, because Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown are keeping a sharp eye upon the world, it must not be thought that they have, as it were, no inward eye of similar magnitude and severity. They have. It is as sharply directed upon themselves and upon each other as it would be if they had no other preoccupation in life. Mrs. Smith may one day be

annoyed at the scrutiny, and say that she does not care, and that Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown are old cats; but Mrs. Smith cannot live altogether without society, and so she tries to live in accord with Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown. Generally, she succeeds in doing so, and she willingly practises the common vigilance. Besides, with natural shrewdness, Mrs. Smith will always, in any case, look before she leaps. The price to be paid for folly is very high indeed, as Mrs. Smith well knows; and she does not wish, and never will wish, to forfeit her own 'niceness' upon any account whatever.

The wish to be 'nice' is widespread. It is held by most men and women; and the wicked ones—if there are really any wicked people in the world—try hard to conceal the fact that they are anything but nice. As a rule they *are* nice, until something uncontrollable makes them not so nice; and then they make an effort not to be found out. After all, 'niceness' of old was only another word for 'fastidiousness,' and it still may sometimes be used with that meaning of those we do not greatly like. If they are found out, the less nice say disagreeable things about those who in spite of temptation have remained nice; but in secret—like naughty children—they would give anything to be nice again. You see how it is—temptation may be very severe, it may try the strongest virtue, and it is always in some form or other with us. We hate temptation, but we cannot help listening to its plausible tongue. We are tempted to lie, to cheat, to steal, to be cruel, inconsiderate, and in many other things wicked. If we are not so tempted there is something radically wrong with us. And if we resist temptation we may be suspected by Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown of secret wickedness, but as long as their sharp eyes are satisfied we shall continue to enjoy precariously the respect that is our due. Let us fall once, and in secret, and we shall prize ever more highly that respect which is ours only because of the ignorance of others. Let us sin often, and be found out, then—seek as we may the company of pariahs



like ourselves—the homes of the virtuous, in spite of all our scoffing, will become to our wistful eyes havens of gracious peace. We shall long for them as those who are deprived of love long vehemently for love itself. The loss of respectability, indeed, is insupportable punishment, amounting almost to spiritual torture.

In order to realize how profound an attachment is felt to respectability, it is necessary only to cast an eye upon the more notorious crimes committed in England. Murder is not, possibly, the most common of all crimes in the civilized world; but it is the crime to which most attention is usually directed. It is the crime above all others to be dictated by reverence for respectability. Setting aside those squalid crimes which have cupidity or mania as their origin, let us remember how many are the cases where an inconvenient husband or wife is quietly removed by violence. Not hatred for the married partner precipitates the crime, but love for another, and the desire to remain socially irreproachable. Otherwise, why murder? Why not fly with the loved one? In the case of a man who slowly destroys his wife by means of arsenical or other poisoning, there may be the knowledge that divorce will diminish his personal income; but in the majority of such cases money is the last thing considered. What is thought of is the respectability of the murderer and his newer love. 'He' or 'she' must not suffer. No finger of scorn must be pointed at 'him' or 'her.' It is a risk, this guilt of shedding blood; but it is the only solution to a passionate problem. Either death for the victim or scandal and dishonour for the beloved. And so the blow is struck, the poison administered, and silence is expected to follow. Silence that covers all until some thought, some darkling flash of insight, crosses the mind of one friend, sister, neighbour, and the terrible cry of accusation arises. How many times has not such murder been discovered first through a recognition of jewellery, once worn by a missing wife, and now in the

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possession of another? How many times have not relations of the dead woman suspected her mourning husband because of his too-early association with somebody else? Dr. Crippen, Major Armstrong, Mrs. Thompson and Frederick Bywaters, and many another name celebrated in the trials for murder of which we may read from year to year—all of them were actuated by the same impulse. To be free—not for life's sake or the sake of love, but solely for the sake of the continued smile and hat-doffing of the community.

Think also of the murders which are *not* committed, the loves that are sacrificed, the sufferings that are silently borne. Are not these illuminations of the same passion? We would rather sacrifice happiness than risk our prestige with friends, acquaintances, and the multitude. And this in a period so given as is our own to talk about unconventionality. 'One can't do these things. They would be talked about.' 'I wouldn't mind, only people are so *horrid*.' Are not these familiar phrases? I can call to mind many of those who dream of defying opinion, who actually consider themselves as beyond the restraints of discipline, who are held back at the last moment by instinctive deference to the opinion of the world. Whether it is by means of hostility or contempt, ridicule or solemn disapproval, the community has always this invulnerable power.

And yet what does the power consist of? Is not the opinion of others merely a crystallization of our own? It is the one test which a modest person, or a person, at least, who is not overloaded with self-complacency, can apply to his or her own performances. The self-sufficient may dispense with the esteem of others, but for most of us this esteem, this well-seeming, is essential. With it, men and women can conquer most problems, even themselves. Without it, they are forlorn indeed. Without the ability to respect themselves, they are better shut away from temptation, as those are who have been unable upon earlier occasions to resist temptation. The self-

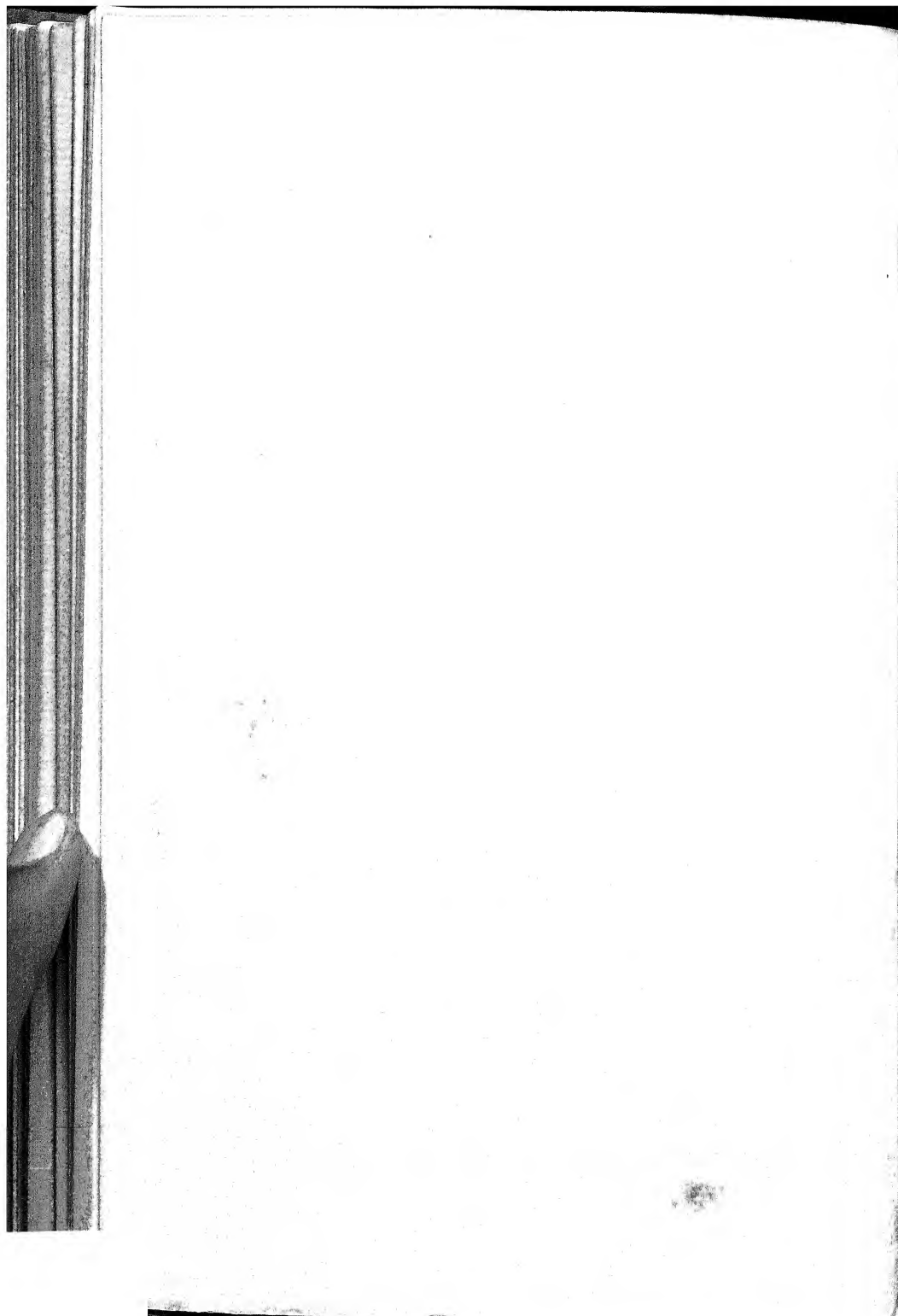
## RESPECTABILITY

respect and the respect of others which are here implied contain no shameful suggestion of hypocrisy. If others are able to respect us, we must, indeed, short of hypocrisy, be respectable. But the great difficulty which all human beings encounter is this, that they are inclined to consider the respectability of their actions, whereas they should be respected for having disinterestedly performed these same actions, quite apart from any question of conventional respectability. There is a double meaning in the word 'respectable' which is confusing. If men and women earn respect by doing what is wise and good, they do well. If they do what is wise and good on purpose to be respected, they do less well. If they do what is neither wise nor good on purpose to be respected, they do ill. Yet respect they must have, or their rather half-hearted self-confidence perishes almost immediately. This is what causes them to have a passion for respectability. They exaggerate the importance of the opinion of others. Instead of behaving in the way they believe to be right, they behave in a way which they think others will approve. From this springs the base aspect of respectability.

For there is no question that ordinary 'respectable' behaviour is often not at all to be respected. It is often very narrow and intolerant, stupid, and prudish. The most timid members of any society disapprove conduct which is quite good and healthy and natural. They become censorious. They do not criticize; they carp. They watch with jealous eyes any gay and thoughtless girl, and make such comments upon her that she either loses her nerve and submits to their narrow standards, or she becomes defiant. She is driven, as it were, into rebellion. She becomes extravagant in action, until the general feeling of the community is against her. In every way, her conduct becomes grotesque and unreasonable. She is considered 'odd,' and she becomes 'odd.' There should be a middle course. One need be neither a prig nor a fool; and should aim to be something half-way between the two.

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This can be compassed if one has good temper, resolution, and self-respect. It cannot be done if one sets up respectability as either a god or an Aunt Sally. As I have suggested, prigs and hypocrites and criminals all alike worship respectability. Good people think little of the name, but do as they think best, always with recognition that there may be other ways, equally good, of thinking and behaving. In this way they earn and receive respect. Incidentally, they help to keep human nature from getting musty, which is a considerable service to mankind.



## LIFE AT FORTY

HAVING lately reached the age of forty, I believe that I may fairly consider myself settled in character. This is not the place to bewail the fact, although few of us are satisfied of our own perfection. We may seem so, and may even inspire hatred in others because of our ability to seem so; but in fact, if we were satisfied, we should be spiritually dead.

But—still dissatisfied—I have been taking stock of the last forty years, and imagining the next—how many years? It is what Arnold Bennett used to call 'a solemnizing thought' that I have lived possibly two-thirds of my life, that I know what I want for the future, and that there is a chance of my getting a fair proportion of what I want.

Few people get what they believe themselves most to desire; but that is because they make one great mistake in youth. They want to *be* something, instead of to *do* something. And their instincts lead them one way, while their judgment leads them another. In such cases instincts often win—more often than not.

And here let me say one hard thing. I have heard many complaints of circumstance from those who have not done as they wished. In all such cases it has been easy to discover an explanation. While the man who fails because he has aimed too high is to be revered, he is a rarity. Such men do not regard their failures. They look forward to further adventure. Their optimism is inexhaustible. But they are not—as some sentimentalists would have us think—the only failures. There is a more common kind of failure, much more often to be

met with. The man who fails because he aims astray or because he does not aim at all is to be found everywhere. He demands our sympathy without shame. He complains freely. He borrows from us the wherewithal to live. He saps our energy with his parasitism. Such a man is merely to be pitied. Nothing can help him, or could ever have helped him, for the reason that he is fundamentally unstable or incapable of helping himself. Such men are as the wild convolvulus. They must cling to others for support of their strangling growths.

Let us pity our failures, but do not let us suppose them to be (as one was once in my hearing extolled for being) failures because they lack alloy, because they are pure gold. They are failures in what they have desired because they have not sincerely desired it, or because they have desired something else more. Or, as I have said, because they are born parasites.

I do not mean to suggest that there is no such thing as luck. On the contrary.

This explanation made, I should like to tabulate some few of the things I do *not* want. There are many others, but these will do.

I do not want money.

I do not want fame.

I do not want a life of gaiety.

I do not want possessions, in the sense of jewels, motor-cars, villas on the Riviera and town houses, slaves, or gold and silver plate.

I do not want innumerable acquaintances.

I do not want contentment.

I do not want 'For he's a jolly good fellow' to be sung when I rise to my feet.

These, I say, are a few of the things I do not want. Other people want such things. To many, they are the prizes of life. Very well, if that is so, we shall know how to distribute such prizes; for if they want them steadfastly enough, these people

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will get them all. But as far as I am concerned, others may have every one of the blessings I do not need.

Some like to find themselves in a theatre, on a first night, surrounded by folk they know. When I go to the theatre it is to see a play; and when the play is over I like to go home to bed. Not for me is the theatre-supper, the after-supper dance, the carouse. Some need these things as stimulants. They wish to have gaiety, excitement. They are incessantly in search of diversion. In return for some imaginary contributions to the credit side of their account with life, they demand quick and frequent settlements. They give little or nothing except their company, but they must have entertainment at any cost.

Others want what they call 'a quiet life.' They want to vegetate. They want to lose interest in everything but their own comfort. I hope I shall never be as they. There are human beings who wish the visible trappings of success, the automobiles, the applause, the servility of hotel employees, the consciousness of opulence and distinction in the world's eyes. How short-sighted are these people! They may have all these blessings, may carry them everywhere, but they may never know the love and respect of their fellow-creatures. As soon as their backs are turned they may be forgotten. As soon as their purses are empty they may lack even hospitality. They may have toadies, but they may never have friends. What a world to live in!

The reason I do not want wealth is that money is only useful in so far as it buys ease and comfort and the regard of those whose regard is not worth having. As for ease and comfort—once one has attained a reasonable degree of comfort, the rest is a superfluity. Luxury is good for nobody except the manufacturer of luxuries. And habitual luxury is a bore, for it kills enjoyment of the occasional rare treat.

Wealth has no value in itself. It has no real value as the means of helping others, because sporadic charity is one of



the most uncertain of all benefits to the unfortunate. I have known some rich men, some 'successful' men, and have found their friends and beneficiaries deferential, flattering, even boastful of acquaintance with the great. This is not the friendship I covet.

And I do not want fame. Of what use is it? It may tickle the vanity for a time, but it becomes an intolerable nuisance. The film star is probably the most famous kind of person now living; and the film star—like a royal personage—has no private life to speak of. There is no privacy for the famous. Every action of theirs is seen and judged; together with some actions which have been only rumoured, invented by some gossip as a topic of sterile conversation. As one famous man once said to me, 'Much worse than the worst is known of me.' The benefits to be derived from obscurity are incalculable. Only the very young believe that it is pleasant to be stared at. The famous person shares such distinction with the infamous.

There is the question of 'influence.' I am told that when one is rich and famous one has great power to do good to the world. Is that the reason men seek fame and fortune? I think not. I think the real motive power is ambition, the ambition to be rich and famous and powerful for the sake of being rich and famous and powerful. I have never had such ambition. In its meanest form it creates the petty domestic tyrant, the shining light of the small debating society, the pompous town councillor, the frog who bursts himself in trying to seem to be a bull.

When I was very young I wanted to be a journalist. I have always wanted to be a journalist, and, although I have contributed articles, reviews, theatrical criticism, stories, and even odd nondescript paragraphs to periodicals since I was fifteen years old, I have never been a journalist. In that respect I have been thwarted by circumstance. The change in direction—for to be a novelist and reviewer is only to vary a

direction—arose from the fact that at the age of sixteen I went into the trade of book publishing.

It was my duty to encounter every caller, ascertain his business, and attend to his wants. As a groundwork for my ultimate occupation the experience gained was invaluable. My employer was always a very difficult man to see, and I had to tackle all sorts of visitors, from those who brought masterpieces to those who wished to borrow half-crowns. It was necessary to decide at sight whether he might wish or be willing to see each man or woman, or whether the caller must be manoeuvred out of the building, without offence, without an interview. It will be seen at once how such a task formed a training in the summary estimate of character, which must always play an important part in the novelist's equipment. It will also be seen how such work influences ambition.

At the age of eighteen, accordingly, I formed the ambition that has remained constant ever since. I wanted to write a novel about human beings. From that moment human beings became my absorbing study. I wrote a novel about human beings. It was not published, but it was written to the bitter end. I wanted at that time to write goodish novels, and to read everything. I wanted to live in a little old-fashioned cottage in the country, to write goodish novels, and to marry for love. It was never my ambition to write great novels—I recognized perfectly that, although I had talent, I was not a genius. But I wanted to do the best I could, to live by the work of my pen, and to be happy.

This last item was a superfluous ambition, because it is very difficult for me to be unhappy. 'Cheerfulness,' as the would-be philosopher once said, 'will keep breaking in.' In the matter of writing I have always done the best I could do at the given moment, and I do not feel that what I have written has ever been more than 'goodish.' As for the rest, I have married for love, and I live in a little Elizabethan or Jacobean cottage in

a charming countryside. And anything human is dearer to me than all the wealth of all the world.

As to friends, I have always found it easy to make them. They are all friends worth having. Most of them are not especially wealthy or famous, but they are loyal, humorous, trustworthy, and beautifully simple. No person is my friend who is not also my superior.

If I had a great deal of money I should not work. But that does not mean that I want to try starvation a second time. I used to want three hundred pounds a year. I thought that if I could make three hundred pounds a year, and live with my wife in a country cottage, I would write the books I liked and read everything.

Well, I now want more than three hundred pounds a year (to some extent because the purchasing power of the pound has diminished, but also because others are dependent upon me); but I have the wife, the cottage, the family; and I have had a great piece of luck. Although my novels have been only 'goodish,' they have secured for me a body of friendly readers in both America and England. These readers do not suffice to make me opulent. But they are constant. Therefore I do not feel bound, as the writers of overwhelming successes may feel bound, to write every book according to the pattern of the last. I write what I want to write. I can earn enough by this means to keep me fed and clothed, and to keep fed and clothed those who belong to me. I have leisure and tranquillity. I have not only attained all the ambitions of my youth (saving only that one which had journalism as its objective), but I have surpassed them. There remains the future.

What do I demand of life? First, health. Second, privacy. Third, a moderate degree of security. Fourth, the continued affection of those who are dear to me. Fifth, leisure to indulge my vice of laziness and read the books I want to read, play the games I want to play, see the places I want to see. These things are all possible, providing the first—health—is vouch-

safed. Privacy is a benefit which determination can secure. In the outdoor studio of my cottage, which has no telephone, I can 'sport my oak' as firmly as any working undergraduate. By means of privacy and the consequent favourable circumstances for work I can write the books I want to write, and obtain such security as any man can enjoy in this modern world of change and passion.

Finally, there is the question of affection. I think that any man can endure if he has good friends. In ordinary life mine may find me facetious and voluble, even tiresome; but when I have had troubles they have been constant and inexhaustible in patience. I should desire them always to remain so.

As to comfort, I have enough of it. A roof, chairs, books, and a bed; a warm fire in the evening. It is ample. It is more than ample. It is ideal. I do not want to live in great hotels or to have many servants at my beck and call. And I do not want anything that will cause me to vegetate, because in return for the benefits I claim from life, it is my desire to write one novel that is more than 'goodish.'

That is the whole point. No man can be satisfied with his attainment, although he may be satisfied with his circumstances. In all the foregoing remarks I have been returning thanks to good fortune. I have been betraying, perhaps, a readiness to be pleased with small results. But I have not been patting myself upon the back. Something more is needed. A philosopher once said to me, 'The man who is satisfied has no future but the dustbin.'

Moreover, I know that it is not the highest type of man who has moderate ambitions. The really great man makes immoderate claims upon life because he is conscious of his power to give to life in return incomparable services. His mind works upon a different plane from mine. His conceptions of life are lofty and incalculable. He may be serene, as Shakespeare was serene; but he dwells apart, wrapt in the inscrutable majesty of power. My own lot in life is less exalted. I have

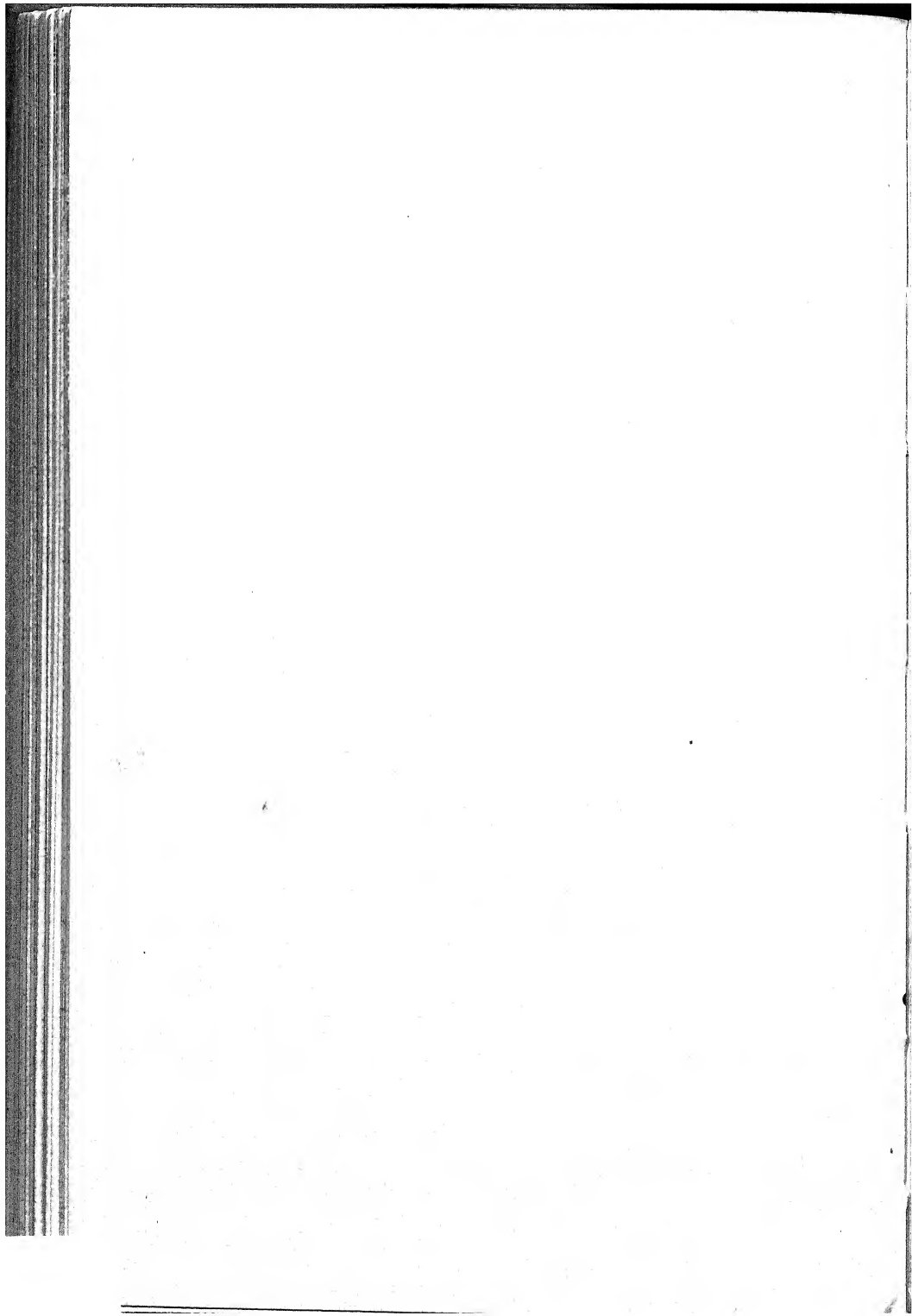
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wanted only to understand human nature. I have not wanted to improve it, or to change the face of the world. There are such idealists, men as far above their fellows as spirit is above animalism. They are bringers of glad tidings to the suffering, the creators of a new era. They are men of destiny. I admire, I reverence them. But my impulses lie more upon the surface. I am agnostic even as regards the destiny of mankind. The stars fascinate and bewilder me; the beauty of the earth is a mystery to my heart. I love the earth, and a great many of those who dwell upon it; but I remain merely a marvelling student of the wonder of the universe and of life itself.

For this reason I look forward to the remainder of my earthly existence as the culmination of all that I am likely ever to know. Having seen and experienced earthly hardship, I demand henceforward immunity from such hardship. I demand tranquillity and the beauty of human affection. But I do not insist that the miracle of life should be explained to me. Having been born ignorant and curious, I expect (with equanimity) to die almost as ignorant and curious as I was born. My ancestors and my environment have given me a not very vigorous body, an extremely buoyant temperament, a modest talent, and considerable facility. To the exercise of these possessions in the future I look forward. I do not demand to be happy, because I expect—on a basis of experience—to be happy. Is not happiness the most satisfactory of all possessions? I think it is. Others may demand wisdom, may demand eternity, or the salvation of the human race. I do not. If there are readers who despise this attitude, I would remind them that when I die I shall be able—in spirit at least—to repeat the memorable last words of William Hazlitt. Hazlitt, as he lay dying, said, 'Well, I've had a happy life.' Which of us—uncertain travellers as we are upon uncharted ways—can ask to say more?

## PART TWO



## A FAREWELL TO REVIEWING<sup>1</sup>

I'VE called this talk 'A Farewell to Reviewing'; but it's more than that. It's a cry of relief; a wail of exhaustion; a Declaration of Independence. It's also an inquiry into the influence of reading on a man's life and character.

Perhaps those last words promise too much. As I grow older I boggle more and more at generalizations, and I want to keep clear of them this evening. But, though I shouldn't call myself a bookish man, reading has been my hobby, my education, and my livelihood; so that I can seriously claim to owe more than most men to books. I was four years old when I first began to tackle them, going to my mother and demanding to know 'What's for boy?' 'What's for horse?' and so on; and I can still recall the enchantment I felt when I was six in reading *The Water Babies* all through. Two years later I was cut off from schools and active sports; and I went out to work as an office boy at the age of fourteen. Without books I should have known even less than I do now of the general state of mankind.

But what made me a reader for something more than casual entertainment was the fact that when I was sixteen I became a clerk in a publisher's office. The publisher was J. M. Dent, an irritable, noisy, limping man with a big grey beard, who bullied everybody, gave his staff an annual tea-fight at Toynbee Hall, and loved books. I think Dent liked me because he thought I wasn't afraid of him; but I was. And the memory I have of those days is of terror, great merri-

<sup>1</sup> A Broadcast in the Third Programme, March 8th, 1948.



ment, a first disrespect—which has lasted ever since—for living authors, and a discovery of Literature as a source of the purest delight. I assure you that Dent was one of the greatest benefactors of poor readers who ever lived. He was determined to bring the best books to all who didn't mind skimping on lunches for the sake of owning classics at a shilling or eighteenpence a time. Everyman's Library didn't exist then (I helped to launch it before I left); but Dent was already famous for the Temple Shakespeare and the Temple Classics, and he deserves immortality for those two ventures and many more.

I can praise him with an easy heart because, besides posting his parcels and interviewing everybody who called to see him, I had charge for three years of his library of file copies. Those three years were what Dent himself would have called 'crucial.' As long as I wasn't too obviously idle, I could dip into every book in the file. I dipped. I also bought. I bought all sorts of books, from Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* to the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*. There was nothing I wouldn't and didn't read in those days. I wolfed the great Russian novelists and the great Victorian poets, and was completely bowled over by Buckle's *History of Civilisation*—but I expect nowadays you think that nothing but a monument of futility. I didn't know. I was busy and enthusiastic. By the time I left Dent at the age of twenty-two I knew much more about books, and especially about the best English literature, than I do now.

So much for this period of preparation. Two years later, in the employment of another firm of publishers, I settled down to sixteen years of happy, endless drudgery—a drudgery of reading and reporting on manuscripts from ten o'clock in the morning until half-past five in the afternoon, and from ten till one o'clock on Saturdays. Most people have no notion of what the publishers' reader endures. I hadn't, myself.

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When the job was offered to me out of the blue it seemed like an answer to prayer. But it was really—if I had known it—a heavy punishment for the deceptive air I then had of being quicker-witted and more intelligent than most boys of my age. My capacity for literary judgment was taken on trust. In my experience, that is just what happens in the publishing trade.

Now the professional reader must have standards and no prejudices. He must be a hack and an enthusiast and a wizard. He must consent to plough all day and every day through the most tiresome rubbish, ever ready to spot a mature genius. He must bring the same patience to a schoolgirl's novelette, a history of Iceland in the Middle Ages, a detective story, a poetic drama about Robert the Devil, an essay on art, or the chronicle of four generations in a Cumberland family. He must never be intolerant. He must never write insults on the margins of a typescript. He must sit over his manuscripts as calm as Old Father Thames, and know at once—I suppose by instinct—whether what he reads has originality, quality, and any prospect of remunerative sale. This last point won't please purists; but it's one of the thorns in the reader's task. As Laertes said of Hamlet, 'his will is not his own; . . .'

He may not, as unvalued persons do,  
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends,  
The safety and health of this whole state,  
And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd  
Unto the voice and yielding of that body  
Whereof he is the head.

Or, if not the head, at least the brains and taste. If he advises rejection, he must be ready to see his rejects successful in the lists of other publishers, and to have his reports re-examined and made the grounds for complaint against him. If he advises acceptance, and the books succeed, he must take no credit, and none will be given him. If they fail—and most

books fail—he must be what is called philosophic. His employer may be less philosophic.

Reading manuscripts is a challenge to insight and enthusiasm; it's also a great training in patience. The moment a professional reader begins to yawn, and toss aside anything outside the range of his personal taste, he's finished. I'm now finished as a publishers' reader. It was otherwise thirty or forty years ago. Then I had such a sense of adventure in the discovery of new talent that even five and a half days a week spent on manuscripts wasn't enough to satisfy it; and I must have been infatuated; for I undertook what I still think the less exacting task of reviewing for the daily and weekly press. Now, charges of corruption are freely made in the literary world, so I must say the reviewing was quite distinct from the manuscript reading. I even earned a scoffing charge of high-mindedness from a great literary editor because I sent him back one of my firm's publications. So it was that for several years I read a thousand manuscripts a year, and three or four or half-a-dozen printed books a week. On each of these manuscripts I had to supply a report outlining its characteristics and justifying a verdict. On each of the books I had to write a review of anything from two to four hundred words in a style to entertain and with a reassuring gravity.

Perhaps it isn't irrelevant to say here that besides reading manuscripts and reviewing books I was also—in odd moments—writing novels. That wasn't from ambition, or for escape. The impulse arose from exuberant nervous vitality and a familiar love of human beings, coupled with great interest in their curious behaviour. But, of course, the best novels aren't written in odd moments snatched from the reading of other men's novels. And I mention the matter because most young novelists do, for a time with great spirit, write reviews of contemporary fiction. A few of them hope to earn some necessary shillings by the work; a few others

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do it in a kind of wild enthusiasm for their craft. Whatever the justification, such reading, week after week, month after month, exhausts the very faculty—the imagination—from which novels, if they are to be good novels, must draw their life. It wearies the mind. It substitutes for the creative writer's natural outlook that of hundreds of other writers which it's sophistication to call 'the spirit of the age.' I say that once a young author's freshness of mind and outlook is lost his future is in danger. He may become conventional; or he may be reduced to the calculated technical virtuosity that ruins too many modern writers—poets as well as novelists—and makes them sterile bores. I don't know which of these two fates is the worse. Therefore the reviewing of novels by young novelists is, from their own point of view, a mistake. It's a mistake I committed. I don't regret having committed it, because I enjoy reading anything short of time-tables and works on mathematics. And in the matter of *writing* novels I've been lucky. But it's a mistake.

That brings me naturally to the general problem of reviewing. I see from time to time comments on the general badness of present-day reviewers, and I accept some of these comments as true. Only some of them. Reviewing has never been a fine art, and when I read reviews of my own books I often find them silly or incomprehensible. But I don't accept the assumption that reviewing is worse than it used to be; it isn't. Nor do I think, as some do, that reviewing, to be good, should be spiteful. To me, the malicious arrogance of the would-be superior person is quite as contemptible as the flatulent praise of the hack. It's the sign of a closed mind; just as the hack's performance is the sign of an uncourageous nature.

I mustn't seem to suggest that there is nothing between arrogance and the hack. We still have a society free enough for the open expression of severity by young reviewers, and I hope the freedom will persist. A literary world without

ruthlessness would be a literary world of old men, old fashions, and decay. On the other hand, a literary world from which tolerance was excluded would be a literary world in paralysis. We don't want that. My notion of a good reviewer is a man of taste and sympathy, experienced in books and human nature; not a censor, not a bigot, but somebody with the imagination to grasp every author's standpoint, the ability to estimate his performance, and the skill to relate both to the general taste of the age.

I don't claim ever to have been such a reviewer. My attitude towards authors and their works, though unavoidable, has been far from ideal. The truth is that anybody whose first contact with literary men is made from the other side of the publisher's counter continues for ever to see them at less than life size. That's what I do. I have such a professional view of their work, and such a sense of them as, behind their work, small and unhappy creatures, turning and twisting illusions and disillusion (mainly about themselves) that my feeling for them all is one of compassion mixed with weariness. I've read too many manuscripts, too many review copies, from youth to what I'm not allowed by my family to call old age, for me to see them as anything but pathetic children. Therefore, just as I'm finished as a publishers' reader, so I'm finished as a reviewer. I no longer want to express opinions about new books.

Accordingly I've taken a resolution which, to me, is important. In future I shall read only the books I want to read, as and when I want to read them. They won't always be the best books; some I shall read professionally in connection with books I hope to write; but if they don't amuse and interest me I shall throw them aside. No longer will I allow myself to feel that millstone of *duty* towards an employer or an unsympathetic author which for nearly forty years has forced me to read millions of dead words in the hope of finding something to encourage, something to praise. I am a free man.

## A PREFACE<sup>1</sup>

ONE day in 1916 Mr. Nigel de Grey, who was then connected with the publishing firm of William Heinemann, and who is inevitably the hero of this preface, produced at luncheon a startling question. Why, he asked, had no man ever written a whole novel about the events of one evening? Mr. Martin Secker and I, to whom the question was addressed, could not answer it. We felt Mr. de Grey might be wrong in thinking his idea new. We racked our memories for titles with which to confute him. We cried: 'Is it true?' and 'How extraordinary!' and 'Surely *somebody* . . .' But we could not recollect a single book which had been written about an evening.

Could not such a book be attempted? One of us, at least, perceived a few of the difficulties involved in the writing of any novel with so restricted a time-table. He saw that the author of it would need to keep an extremely clear head, reject stuffing and divagation, and walk a kind of technical tightrope. But he was a good deal fascinated; and in some way his imagination was fired by a surprisingly powerful mental picture of darkness. This was to be a book, not about a day, but about a night. It was to be a romantic book. Should he? Could he, without making a fool of himself, write a book about half-a-dozen hours? About half-a-dozen people?

He had two things in his favour as the author of such a

<sup>1</sup> To the edition of *Nocturne* published in 1937 in the World's Classics. Reprinted by kind permission of The Oxford University Press.

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book. The first of these was that he wrote for pleasure (for he did not then regard himself as a professional author) in the evenings of days well-filled with congenial work; the second that in Mr. Secker he had at hand a publisher who was instantly ready with encouragement and enthusiasm. Within half an hour he had decided. 'I wish,' said Mr. Secker, 'you'd write a short novel that I could publish.' He answered: 'How would you like me to write one about the events of a night?' The result was *Nocturne*, the first novel known to have been concerned with this theme. I cannot say what other distinction it has.

The author of *Nocturne* was at that time thirty-two years of age. He was by profession a publishers' reader and a reviewer; and he had already written six novels which had been kindly praised but of which the most successful had sold no more than fifteen hundred copies in England. During childhood and boyhood he had lived in great poverty, and his understanding of the lives and thoughts of what are known as ordinary people was thus natural, and not deliberately acquired. When, therefore, he planned his book, which was at first called, rather poorly, *The Black Cloak*, and then, after a favourite poem by Herrick, *Night-piece* (that title was afterwards discarded as being orally ambiguous), his imagination turned at once to the kind of people he had known as a child. He had no acquaintance with any such girls as Jenny and Emmy; they and their companions in the book were as fictitious as the story. His only familiarity with Kennington Park was gained by some walks taken in that neighbourhood while the book was in progress. His life had been spent entirely in districts north of the Thames, where it is believed that Northerners are superior to South-rons. But essential experience of mean streets was at his command, and he was determined to begin this tale of a single evening with the brilliance of moving lights upon Westminster Bridge.

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Why? Westminster Bridge was for him quite perfectly the centre of London; the flowing river beneath it was at night terribly exciting; perhaps, unconsciously, he had already recognized that a yacht, moored below, would assure his lovers not only of privacy but of isolation. They would be out of the world of every day. For, as he struggled to find a scene in which Jenny and Keith could meet, the word 'yacht' had leapt into his thoughts from, apparently, nowhere at all; and that word had lifted the tryst from furtiveness to romance. What might have been, in surroundings stale to Jenny, nothing but a bitter squabble ending in misery and parting, was subject to the enchantment of the unknown. A yacht. The only yacht the author had been aboard was Arnold Bennett's *Velsa*; and he had joined it, upon his visit in July, 1914, at Westminster. Furthermore, from the *Velsa*, at night at Holehaven, he had been rowed by his host over frighteningly still, deep, and very black water. That memory of moonless terror was unforgotten. Everything helped to fix the yacht in his thoughts, and, for him as well as for Jenny, to exalt the scene.

Well, the settings were clear, and the characters and the time-table. But there were other difficulties unconnected with the pleasant craft of fiction-writing. In the winter of 1916-17 when he had hardly recovered from a long and serious illness, the author was kept very busy all day reading manuscripts or books for review. He had some harassing domestic troubles of a trivial kind which added to his busyness. Work upon *Nocturne* could only be done between eight and ten o'clock each evening, and once the book had been begun it was delivered chapter by chapter to Mr. Martin Secker, who sent the original manuscript to the printers. On the day after the last chapter had been so despatched the first galley proofs reached the author. Mr. Secker said, in bringing these proofs: 'It begins well.' In bringing the second batch he said: 'I think it's very good.' And at last he said 'I think it's a masterpiece.'



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The English reviewers, on the whole, did not agree. They had preferred the author in earlier moods. But both Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. H. G. Wells approved of *Nocturne*; and while the English sales were at first very small, Mr. Wells, unknown to the author, agreed to write a preface for the American edition which entirely changed the book's fortunes in the United States. There, it was received with extraordinary enthusiasm. It enjoyed a considerable sale; and it seems to have been granted a sort of perpetual life. Mr. Wells said in his preface (they were wonderful, generous words): 'If Mr. Swinnerton were never to write another word I think he might count on this much of his work living.' But Mr. Bernard Shaw, in a letter to the author, gloomily declared: 'You make your people live all right enough. You would be much better employed in killing them.'

My own view is that those who have praised *Nocturne* very highly have been mistaken. But whenever I say this I receive a rebuke from some admired contemporary who urges me to read the book for myself. This, it is true, I have never done. For some reason I cannot re-read my own books, and I strongly sympathize with those who cannot read them at all. But I recall *Nocturne* well enough to feel justified in saying that I wish the chapter called 'After the Theatre' were not such an interruption of the main plan. This chapter is the best part of *Nocturne*: if I were now to write it for the first time I should make some changes and perhaps ruin it. And yet the book is about Jenny, not about Emmy. Those who extol the form of *Nocturne* forget this.

Having said that, I must qualify it. Turning the pages I do catch a certain aroma. I know that, working at speed and with a definite sense of the quick passage of time, I must have been roused to an urgency of feeling otherwise rare in a person as sensible and equable as myself. Night and the power of darkness, the silence following those rolling strokes of Big Ben, the delight which I always feel in what Henry

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James called 'the blest operation' of the Jacobean Dramatic Principle, his 'law of successive Aspects' (it will be recognized by those who are interested in such things that each scene in *Nocturne* is in form a duologue) were all at work upon imagination, stimulating it and tempering it. Although I shrink from the restricted time-table as a calculatedness warring with my view—possibly a sentimental view—of creation as something spontaneous upon the detail of which judgment subsequently works, I believe that there is not in the *writing* of the book a scrap of fake.

There are a few errors. No yacht would anchor in the River Thames at Westminster Bridge; it would be moored there. Keith being a Scotsman, could not have been deprived of a share in his father's estate. And Jenny would not have worn at once a hat which she had just steamed into revived jauntiness. These are all that I know of. I mention them in order to remark that those who sneer at the inaccuracies of novelists do not realize how generally novelists are expected to be walking encyclopaedias. They can hardly set pen to paper without discovering an ignorance of some necessary fact. Much more important is the question of psychological accuracy.

I claim to be a psychological novelist, one who bases his work upon exceptional quickness of intuition, and not one who has accepted a foreign pathologist's system and used it as Holy Writ. I may overestimate the value of sympathy as an unauthenticated scholarship; but it is at least something so personal to the writer as to make whatever he writes about his fellow men, in a strict sense of the word, original. If *Nocturne* deserves to be read at all it is because the book, so far from being merely a technical performance, is a psychological drama in the truth of which the reader can believe. The fact that it is also technically ingenious seems to me to be interesting but unimportant.

Its ingenuity has caused a number of people to suppose

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that it could easily be converted into a play. All such people have perished. The drama of the novel is altogether different from the drama of the stage. There is no action here; there is only conflict. The novelist creates his own atmosphere, and depends upon a variety of dexterities for something akin to visual illusion. He has no accomplished actress to play the part of his heroine; no footlights; no curtain to emphasize his climaxes. But he has immeasurable resources in the matter of indication. If his own belief is strong enough he can persuade all but resistant readers that what he tells is actually happening in their own experience. He can make the spoken words of his characters assume tone and colour. He can tell what they think and feel, as well as what they say and do. If he does this successfully he is, in my opinion, an artist, whatever the form of his novel. But there is no doubt that a psychological drama which is condensed into a very short period of time does approximate to a play. *Nocturne* is the nearest thing I have ever written to a play. Is it for that reason a better novel?

I do not know. I do not think so. A literature composed of *Nocturnes* would be disastrous; and as far as I am concerned the novel of condensed time has now become, in all its modern instances, highly artificial, a sort of arbitrary form imposed because the theme as the author has imagined it has no organic form. I prefer the Trollopean manner, in which the author begins at the beginning and slowly hastens at an even pitch of narrative to the ultimate development of his tale. I hope the Trollopean novel will return. I dislike the tricks and quirks of the technicians of our day so much that I wish I could shovel them all into oblivion. But I must admit that I am deeply grateful to *Nocturne*, little as I approve of it, for bringing me into the august company of Trollope in the World's Classics.

## H. G. WELLS

A VALUED and outspoken woman friend once gave H. G. Wells some advice. 'Never be photographed. Never speak in public. Never engage in controversy.' She was very shrewd, and her advice was good; but it was not followed.

Wells was a short man who, especially to hostile eyes, looked commonplace. He had a small, hoarse voice which soon rose to squeakiness. And in controversy he always lost his temper. Nevertheless, to the end of his life he sent this too candid friend all his new books and to the end of his life he endured with patient good-temper every comment she could hurl at him.

That was characteristic. He did not enjoy adverse criticism. It sent him to bed with his fists in his eyes, like a little boy who has lost a race. But where he really liked a person he was loyal; and, although quarrelsome, he would accept candour from that person. If he received candour from people he did not like his reaction was different.

On the other hand he was so active and so impatient of gentility or ponderous argument, that he constantly gave offence. He had such mischievous quickness of mind that ridicule of the less quick came easily to him. His eye for physical or mental defects was so unerring as to seem diabolical.

Even in print, as a novelist, he was at his best in caricature; and in conversation, when his bright blue eyes darted everywhere, at and beyond his immediate audience, he could be

irresistibly devastating. So his enemies were vindictive and his opponents never hesitated to strike, as it were, with the bare knuckle.

Of course, Wells was vulnerable. His private affairs were much too public and much too open to censure. His whole life was known to the world. His father, once a professional cricketer (Wells hated cricket), had afterwards been an unsuccessful small shopkeeper. His mother for some years was a domestic servant, then lady's maid, and finally housekeeper in a big house in Sussex.

As a boy he had to touch his cap to the rich; he listened restlessly (but with an excellent memory) to the unctuous conversation of ladies' ladies and gentlemen's gentlemen; and, because his mother adored respectability, he was apprenticed to a linendraper.

Wells, who knew what it was to be poor, vividly understood the poor; but he did not love them. He was impatient of their tolerance. He wanted to end poverty by planning, not through humanitarianism. He had been a planner from boyhood, as that 'Schema' of Mr. Lewisham's showed. And because his bent and training were scientific he saw as his ideal a new, sanitary Utopian World State from which science had banished want, sport, squalor, and the incongruities which even in war-time lift our hearts to laughter.

He wrote about this ideal in book after book, often repeating himself. He also pressed various bodies to work for it. First the Fabian Society, then the League of Nations, then the Labour Party was to be the instrument of the Wellsian plan. When none of them would embrace it he grew disappointed, and, towards the end of his life, embittered.

For the greater part of his life, however, he was far from bitter. He was a merry little boy of genius with some of a boy's bad habits. If you had met him at a children's party you would have been enchanted by his zest and inventiveness;

for he played games—from hockey and lawn-tennis to demon patience—with delightful frenzy.

With shrill shouts, he tried for every shot. He hated to be beaten; but when he pretended to sulk at a defeat it was only pretence. He would say: 'What can we play, that I can *win!*' It was his fun.

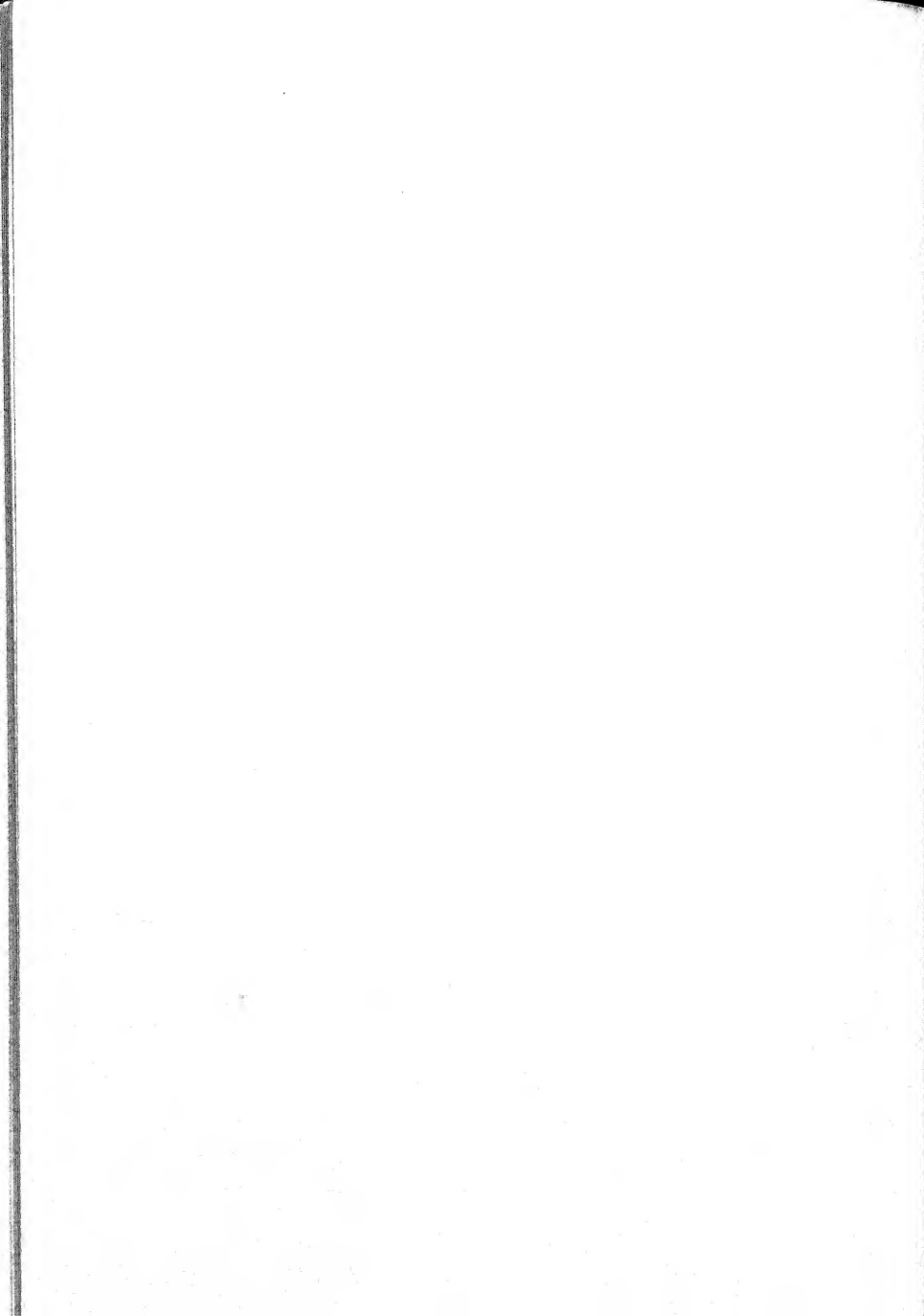
He did most things for fun. He wrote for fun, unless in the thrall of Utopia or some other devil. His short stories, written early, and occasionally immortal, are full of fun, marvellously quicksilvered by that flying ingenuity which he never lost.

His novels, right up to *Tono-Bungay*, and after *Tono-Bungay* the classic *Mr. Polly*, are brimming with fun. He himself shared with Dickens that relish for fun which makes Dickens the greatest English novelist.

He could perhaps have done more for literature if he had written more *Tono-Bungays* or more short stories or another *Mr. Polly*. He chose to teach; and the teacher is sooner forgotten than the worker in that less tangible, but timeless, material, the imagination.

Wells's teaching has passed. Therefore we who knew him have a clear duty, which is to keep alive memory of the merry, affectionate genius whom we knew and loved.

August 14, 1946



## ARNOLD BENNETT

ARNOLD BENNETT was the best, the kindest, the most generous, and the greatest man with whom I have ever come into close contact. He had great sagacity, great simplicity, a good deal of most lovable vanity; and he was astoundingly modest. The better one knew him the more one loved him, and the more impressive his quality as a man became.

All his friends will agree with me as to his character, even if they deny greatness to his literary work. And all will agree that to a powerful personality, in which resoluteness, integrity, and a love of plain speaking had their obvious place, he united a charm at once mischievous and benign which many of his readers must have missed.

Strangers often formed very different opinions from these. They were sometimes a little frightened by his reputation. They misconstrued his abruptness of manner. They found him assertive and inflexible. And they believed the legend that he was a man who had mapped out his life with the sole object of amassing money. Many of them resented his success. But I do not know anybody who was indifferent to him.

Let me try to give some notion of what Arnold Bennett looked like. He was stoutly built and about five feet ten inches in height. He held himself very erect and his shoulders very rigid, so that his body had no natural swing as he walked, but rather swayed stiffly from side to side. He always walked slowly and with great seriousness.



His brow was square and rose straight from eyes that looked tired, because of rather heavy eyelids, to the small flourish of hair which latterly replaced the famous coif made fun of by caricaturists. His cheeks were clear and showed a faint colour. His mouth was irregular and his upper teeth were also irregular.

The eyes, once the first impression of tiredness had passed, were a warm brown, and smiled. Bennett was a master of the wink. When some effusive stranger buttonholed him to express admiration, Bennett was at all times courteous; but, if he caught a friendly eye beyond his enthusiast, one of those heavy lids would irresistibly quiver.

In repose his expression, I should have said, represented calm melancholy. But his smile was very sweet, and the aura of kindness which surrounded him was such that he was extremely popular with children. Odd as it may seem to some, he could converse with children very effectively. But he was a shy and sensitive man, who normally talked little.

When I first knew him, he once referred to Mr. H. G. Wells's unlimited brilliance as a conversationalist by saying briefly: 'He talks, you know. I can't do that.' And in those days he could not, or did not, talk. When pressed for an opinion by guests at his own table, he would often jerk his head in my direction, and say: '*He'll* tell you.'

One day I said to him: 'I talk too much.' He said: 'Yes; but from politeness.' It was politeness that caused Bennett to talk more freely in later years. He did not really enjoy talking. But he talked to entertain his guests, to 'make things go,' and he did this very well, though sometimes with exaggeration of his own mannerisms.

And I am here reminded to mention a fact which explains much about Bennett which has puzzled and irritated his less sympathetic readers. I have said that he was exceptionally shy and sensitive. He stammered. It was not a slight stammer;

but when he was at all agitated the stammer became a complete inhibition of speech.

So strong was his will that he always persisted in fighting the stammer until he could pronounce the word he had in mind; but these struggles often caused disconcerting delays and silences, and their possibility was ever present in his mind. Hence his abruptness, which communicated itself to his writing, and gave that writing an air of dogmatism.

He would say, if his opinion were challenged: 'I can't argue.' It was often thought that he disdained argument. This was not the case. He argued with his intimates; but with his intimates he rarely stammered, unless he had something painful to tell them.

His voice was rather harsh, and gave the impression of being high-pitched. His manner was, to friends, genial. Very often, one would catch sight of him from a little distance, seated, very carefully smoking a cigarette. Probably making a note in a tiny notebook which he always carried. His expression would be grave.

But as one approached he would look up. 'Hello, boss,' he would say, saluting with a finger to his forelock. Or, if one had a surname which he liked to pronounce, but which offered difficulties to his tongue, he would *say* the first letters with mock ceremoniousness—as 'Well, Mister S-W-I-inner-ton.' Comparatively few people, except in company, called him 'Arnold.' To innumerable friends, old and young, he was 'A.B.' It was as if they used a diminutive.

And his friends really were innumerable. They were absolutely sure of his interest and his integrity. They went to him with all sorts of petitions, troubles, confessions. He listened to them at length; then he gave his advice. He corresponded with them—hundreds of them. He was always ready to help them, and did so, with money, encouragement, and sympathy.

Sometimes he would refer to one of them as 'he.' 'That chap,' he would say. A pause. A jerk of the head. Then: 'He

has to be *helped*.' And he *was* helped. Once, when I had received an appeal, and had shown him the letter, he said (though he did not know the applicant): 'What are you going to send! I should like to do the same!' And out popped one of the odd cheques which he always carried for emergencies.

He came, as is well known, from Staffordshire; and I think his first interest in myself (otherwise a literary interest) arose from the fact that mine is a Staffordshire name. He was born a Methodist. And in spite of the fact that intellectually he was an agnostic he remained essentially a Methodist (and a Midlander) all his life.

The sneers of some people (who had not learned courtesy in the course of an otherwise elaborate curriculum) at his 'provincialism' had no truth so far as his intellect and his imagination were concerned. He was provincial in the sense that the Provinces, the backbone of England, are provincial. He also retained certain provincialisms of speech and pronunciation (I only mean in such words as 'bath' or 'ask,' in which he used the light 'a,' and such phrases as his favourite 'We shall look a bit soft').

He was easily impressed by magnificence or by a display of knowledge. I think he could at times be caught by the second-rate. But only for a time, for his judgment was in constant repair, and his scrutiny was very unsentimental. Otherwise, when he was thought 'provincial,' he was often just humorous. As for example when he moved into a house where the panels of all the doors had been decorated by a former tenant with mirrors. At my first visit to this house I said, 'Oh, Lord! I couldn't stand all this looking-glass!' He replied, blandly, 'I was born for it!'

He dressed with great care. His shirts were always super-fine. Once, when he dined in company with a very great personage, the personage broke a long silence by saying: 'Mr. Bennett; do you mind if I ask you something?' Bennett

agreed to be asked something. 'Do you mind telling me where you get your shirts?'

It was a great moment. I can imagine the wave of Bennett's hand—for he used, deliberately, a good deal of not always graceful gesture—as he responded. That was what I meant in referring to his lovable vanity. He could be, and was, teased endlessly as to his clothes; but he did give them a great deal of thought. As a consequence he was always described by *The Tailor and Cutter* as 'the best-dressed author in London.'

What interested him most of all, however, was not clothes. Nor was it talk. He had a really passionate interest in human nature; and a really passionate love of the fine arts. You had only to look at his beautiful and sensitive hands (of which I never knew him to be conscious) to realize a delicacy for which his manner might not have prepared you; only to be in his company during the performance of music or before pictures, to realize that power he had of yielding himself completely to beauty.

He was not a systematic critic, but was purely intuitive. As a result, some of the opinions he expressed on particular artists or particular works were erratic. The elegant often shivered at his judgments. On the whole, however, these judgments (unless they were roundly stated, when it was wise to suspect them) wore well, and will wear well.

He was a little bitten with the desire to be up to date. Not in private. Some of his friends used to tease him about his pronouncements. He was always ready for such gibes; and equal to them. And at the end of a bout of opposed statements either the opinions did not seem so eccentric, or Bennett would remark: 'Well, there may be something in what you say.' Immediately afterwards, recovering himself, he would add: 'But not much.' He would never yield to argument; but he would listen to it 'with due respect.'

Not always, though. Several years ago, the date of Marie

Lloyd's birth became a subject of dispute between us. I said she was born in 1870. Bennett said I was wrong; that she must have been born much earlier. I insisted. He said: 'We'll soon settle it. I've got all the reference books in my study.' He disappeared. Ten minutes later, he returned. 'Extraordinary!' said he. 'I've looked in a dozen books. And they're ALL wrong!'

But he was laughing as he spoke. His downrightness—when not due to his stammer—was largely an innocent pose. He was also, as I have said (the remark may have caused some rubbing of eyes), an excessively modest man. He never spoke of his own books, though often of the number of words he had written that day. He accepted printed criticism (though it was sometimes violent) better than any other author I have ever known. His response to private praise, when he took it seriously, was one of surprise and pleasure.

Indeed, as a proof of his modesty, I recall that once, when somebody not myself had repeated quite reasonable praise of his work, he meditatively said: 'Well, it's odd, but I can't see it!' This was the truth. In public he always pretended to be delighted with his own performance.

His greatest vanity was that he was a man-of-the-world. He was never a man-of-the-world. He had not the pulpy sentimentality veneered with cynicism that is characteristic of that species. He was, on the contrary, once he went outside his own shrewd, practical genius, simple almost to *naïveté*.

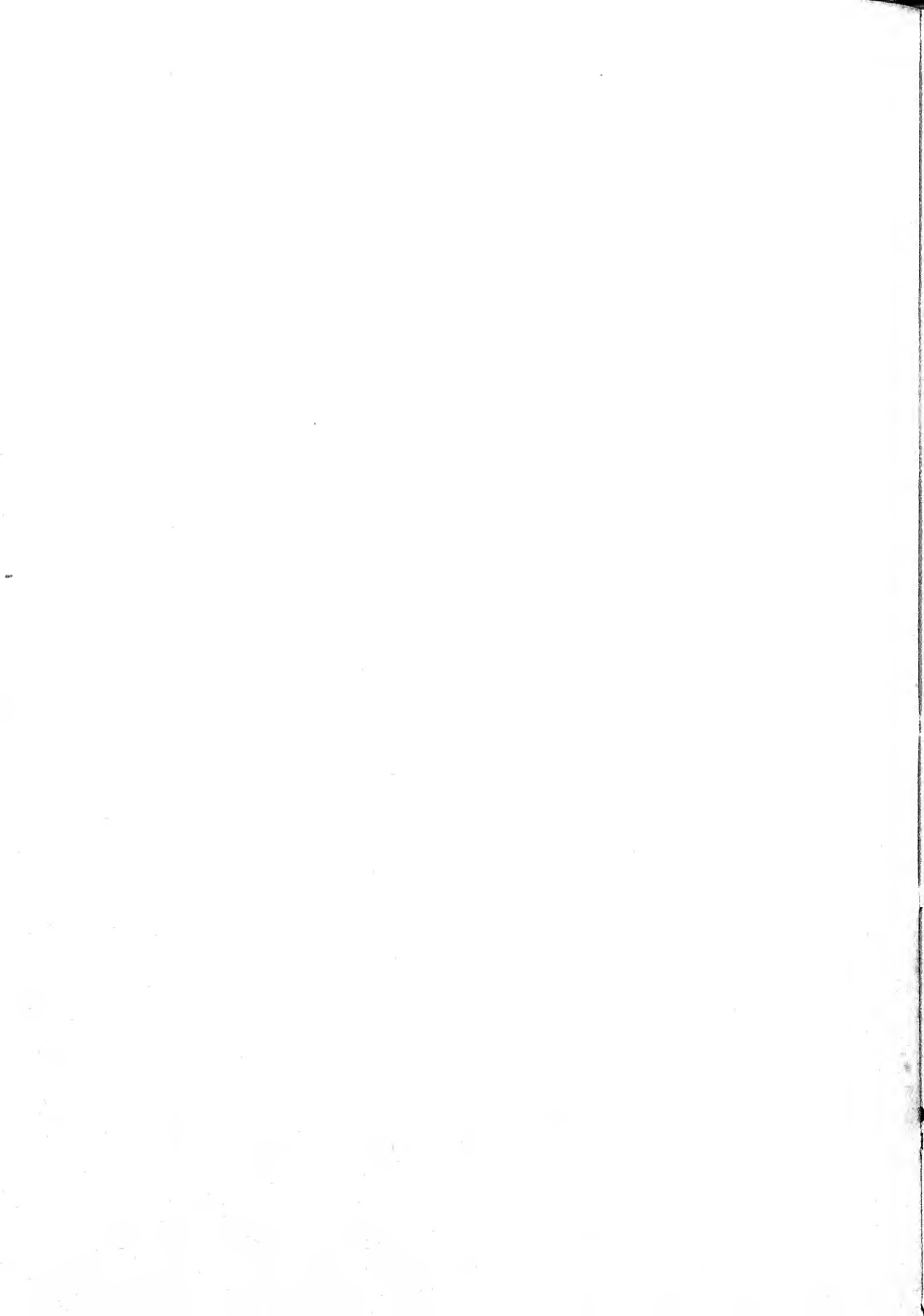
He had the loving heart of a good man, plus the sensitiveness of the artist, the efficient mind of the practical thinker, the timidity of the stammerer, the determination of the midlander, the rigour of the moralist, and the generosity of greatness. I think he was a great writer, but he was a greater man.

As for his personality, it is not without significance that he came from the same county as Doctor Johnson. It was his habit to say that 'nine out of every ten people improve on

ARNOLD BENNETT

acquaintance,' and the more one knew Arnold Bennett the more one marvelled at the sympathy, the patience, the large tolerance, and the essential sweetness and simplicity which were the sources of his strength and of the affection of his friends.

*March 28, 1931*



## ✓WHAT I WANT MY DAUGHTER TO BE

ON the whole, perhaps, the children of writers are to be pitied. They are born with pens in their ears and ruled paper in their hands. They enjoy little of the privacy of the anonymous; and wherever they go they are labelled, as it were, with expectations of precocious literary talent. How some of them must detest the very art of spelling! How they must fly from books as an outdoor tea-party flies from a swarm of wasps!

They are told, it is true, stories which have never been heard before. If they are very lucky, they may find their parents unusually tolerant—tolerant, that is, of all things except the work of other writers. But the stories they hear are often printed afterwards; their own sayings and doings may turn up very inconveniently in parental novels and tales; their names may be bandied about a couple of continents before they are old enough to protest; and—speaking personally—I would not wish my worst enemy, if I have one, perpetual imprisonment in a literary household.

However, the authors are also to be pitied. It is natural that they should turn to account some quite fresh material which lies deliciously under their noses. They are amused by small voices and the activities of growing minds. They are in the habit of writing about what amuses them. Especially if the children are solitary children, without brothers and sisters, their fathers cannot fail to respond to what seems an unparalleled miracle. And publishers tempt authors. I, for instance, have already been offered—I hope and believe in



merry jest—a blank contract to write something called *The Book of Olivia*.

I shall not do it. While not, I hope, stooping to point blank denial, I shall conceal from my daughter for as long as possible the fact that her father is an author. I shall let her think, as she does at present, that he is only an extravagantly funny but useless assistant in the household, whose appearances are incalculable and whose interests are much like her own. She shall never see me at work, and as long as I can stop her she shall never read one of my books. I will give no lessons in spelling or encouragements in the composition of verses. If I allow her the early use of pencil and paper, as I mean to do, it will be solely because many years ago Mr. H. G. Wells prophetically advised in favour of this course as a training in freehand drawing. I may tell her, vocally, if I can think of any such, a story or two; but they will never be printed. They will never be written down. This is because I have other ideas about the encouragement of the young. It is also because, as you have guessed, I know very well what I want my daughter to be.

I do not want her to be an intellectual. I do not want her to be six feet tall, or to say 'dernt' when she means 'don't', or to ride to hounds, or to recite, or to paint her finger nails scarlet, or to get drunk, or to talk loudly, or to begin every afterthought with the words 'I mean,' or to be a snob, or to bite her nails, or to spend hours on the telephone with somebody whom she addresses as 'Darling,' or to be spiteful, or to be cinema-mad, or to gush, or to be affected, or to be full of stubborn common sense, or to be a paranoiac, or to be untidy or morbidly tidy, or to prefer any place in the world—whether it be a dirty studio in Chelsea or the tin-pot dining-room of a seaside-hotel—to her own home.

No, I want her to be healthy, cheerful, and quick-witted. I want her to have the kind of imaginativeness which is known as sympathy. And I want her to be graceful in both

mind and body. Then she will manage her life with a minimum of interference from others, and nothing else will matter very much. Of course, if she can have exceptional courage and charm I shall not object; but in my view courage springs from health, and charm—which may be defined as the outward expression of inward delight—springs readily from quick-witted cheerfulness. It is a sort of natural poise. Possessing it, one need not push. I do not want her to push. Nor do I want life to be too easy for her.

That is the real reason for concealment of the fact that her father is a writer. I am not ashamed of being a writer, because penmanship is an honourable enough craft; and indeed I am thankful for every small gift I own, as well as for the interest and variety to be drawn from the common life of a writer. But far too many people nowadays—perhaps because they have so little confidence in their own judgment, and are unduly impressed by signs of the approval of others—seem to me to have a vulgar love of association with those whom they regard as 'well-known.' And the child of a well-known parent or well-known parents, being always stamped, as it were, with an accidentally familiar name, is apt to be treated as one of a superior caste. Having earned nothing at all from society by personal merit, he or she is ushered for compliment's sake to a front seat, and, being flattered without reason, is thereafter severely handicapped in the progress towards fine character by a mass of evil privileges. No privileges, if you please, until she has deserved them by her own performance, for my daughter.

No privileges and no special protections of cotton wool. The moral to be drawn from the tale of the sleeping beauty is that if one tries to protect her from the prick of a needle every precaution will be vain. The coddled and cosseted girl is a precious abomination. But this does not mean that I wish my daughter to be hardened by Spartan exposures. I do not. In fact I believe that Spartanism at the expense of

children has had its malignant day and done its atrocious harm. The yelling baby in the perambulator, so far from learning to stand upon its own feet, will probably, in after life, join the ranks of the permanently disgruntled. We have altogether too many of such children now; and they tend to be a social nuisance. I will have no unheeded yelling from my daughter, and no sense of neglect, impotence, or misery. Instead, she shall have in full measure the assurance that comes of knowing from cradle days that one is truly loved and respected by one's parents.

To the value to character of this assurance, I can testify in my own person. I have had a hard and a happy life, full of illness and disaster, and the buoyant recoveries of a good constitution; and owing to the fact that my own parents showed unlimited affectionate interest and amusement when I was a baby I have always united to much-remarked modesty an exceptional degree of self-reliance. I was made to think, as a child, that I was interesting, that I was not a bore, that people liked me. Not that I was important, or particularly gifted; but that other people were my friends. This still seems to me to be a good lesson, and I have never unlearned it. I should like my daughter also to learn it. I want her to be at ease in any company, and to meet the rest of mankind—rich, poor, awkward, and bumptious—with the confident considerateness of self-reliance.

She is already healthy, cheerful, and quick-witted. How far ought she to be an educated woman? I said earlier, <sup>5</sup> that I did not want her to be an intellectual. That is because my experience of intellectual women is that they are often very silly, very petty, very undeveloped in the qualities of character which I consider valuable. But I certainly do not wish any child of mine to be a dunce. Though detesting prodigies and the ostentatiously cultured, I should wish her to be quietly, modestly, and reasonably accomplished. I should like her to love music and to play at least one instrument; but not to

refer to the works of classical composers by their opus numbers or to wrinkle her little nose at innocents who listen with pleasure to Rossini, Offenbach, Sullivan, or Smetana. I should like her to speak at least two languages besides English; but not to be a polyglot or to snigger at mistakes made by other people in pronunciation, word, or gender. I should like her to be able to draw with skill, to sew finely, to cook with enjoyment, to know the difference between good wine and bad, to look comprehendingly at pictures, and to appreciate Greek, Gothic, and Baroque architecture. I do not want her to be a Wrangler, or a pedant, or an archaeologist, or anything else which will cause her to feel more than innate, English, Swinnertonian superiority to the rest of mankind. On the other hand, I do not want her to think meanly of herself. I want her, in face of every discouragement, to believe in her own incapacity for failure or treachery.

This, it seems to me, is the whole secret of a happy life—that one should be considerate of others, modest, self-respecting, and determined to walk alone. I dislike those who are brusque, who bully, who whine, who are artful in seeking their own advantage. I shall not mind if my daughter lies for fun, or if her manners sometimes fail in perfect respect for her father. Nor, if she has a strong will, shall I object to its exercise as long as she expresses herself in positive action and not in negative disregard of others. But what I do not want, at any price, is a child without a mind of her own, a child who clings and sucks strength from others, a child who has no self-confidence and no ability to pick herself up after a tumble. Rather than be burdened with such a child I would take a whip to her.

I wish my daughter to have a quick temper and to develop control of it. I wish her to have the capacity for suffering, and the power to endure this suffering without public wails or public collapses. I wish her to eschew all anodynes, and to have a pride as fierce as Lucifer's. I do not wish her to have

that bawling capacity for self-righteous indignation which so many young men and women have to-day. Anger should be quick and quickly spent. It should be personal, and not vicarious. It should be real anger, and not merely the exasperation that comes of fretted nerves or facile emotion. I do not want her to indulge in histrionics, to boast that she 'sees red,' to be sentimental about immoral slovens, drunkards, or the inequalities of fortune. On the contrary, I would have her the least trifle cool towards social misfits and rebels, towards friends who impudently dress old fallacies in new phraseology and call them 'modn,' and towards bigots of every hue. In youth she cannot fail to make her generous mistakes. I would not wish a single one of them away. She is bound to pass through phases of moral and aesthetic delusion, such as all ardent spirits must encounter as they adventure through life. I shall not object to these or even pray that they may be brief. But I hope that whatever her mistakes of detail, and whatever her eager enthusiasms for the false good and the third rate, she will keep her eyes set forever upon the ultimate sanity of what I must call imaginative reason.

I want all these things for one purpose only. If my daughter is to receive no social advantage from the fact that her father is a writer, she should at least receive from him whatever help his temperament and experience of men can give. And the object of early sympathy, the encouragement of fun and quick-wittedness in the cradle, though it is not strictly utilitarian, is that she should be happy from the outset and through life, that she should trust others and give them her rich benevolence of interest, that she should be instinctively magnanimous, and that she should learn very early indeed to laugh first at herself, and only then, without cruelty, at others. I do not want her to enjoy a protected happiness, or an ignorant happiness; I do want her to be happy in self-acceptance and self-forgiveness.

Now it seems to me that the majority of people are un-

happy because they wonder whether others are taking any interest in them. They show off in order to attract attention and to impress, and they learn to sneer quickly in case somebody else may sneer first. They imitate. They toady. They feel resentment. They suspect any glance they intercept of being a reproach or a criticism. In a great, noisy, rapid-moving society such as ours they are all very lonely and rather frightened; and unless they can have a good deal of racket and shouting which they call 'fun,' or unless they are constantly receiving flatteries and reassurances of the little power they wield, they live in the dumps. This sort of thing is useless to such a woman as I want my daughter to be. She must imitate for a time, until she learns to go her own way; she must show off for a little while, because somebody very small is sure to need an audience for her best performances. But I hope the days of imitation and showing off will pass as quickly as possible; for I want her to be an individual, independent, capable of moral fearlessness, and at the same time indifferent to every meaner aspect of ambition. I want her to think all the time of performance; never of rewards.

All this, you will say, puts rather a heavy burden upon a pair of shoulders which as yet is narrow. It does. But it must be admitted that life is not very easy for most of us; and we can all remember those we knew in our own childhood, who for want of that stiffening of the moral fibre which we call character have collapsed or contented themselves with so much less than second best that they live miserably in lethargy or unhappiness. I do not, of course, expect my daughter to be perfect. I think it likely that she will, being my daughter, be extremely imperfect. But I want her to have a good conscience, to be loved, to be happy; and it seems to me that possession of the qualities and accomplishments I most admire will assuredly contribute to that best of all fortunes. I may be wrong.

And now, if you will excuse me, I will leave you. I wish

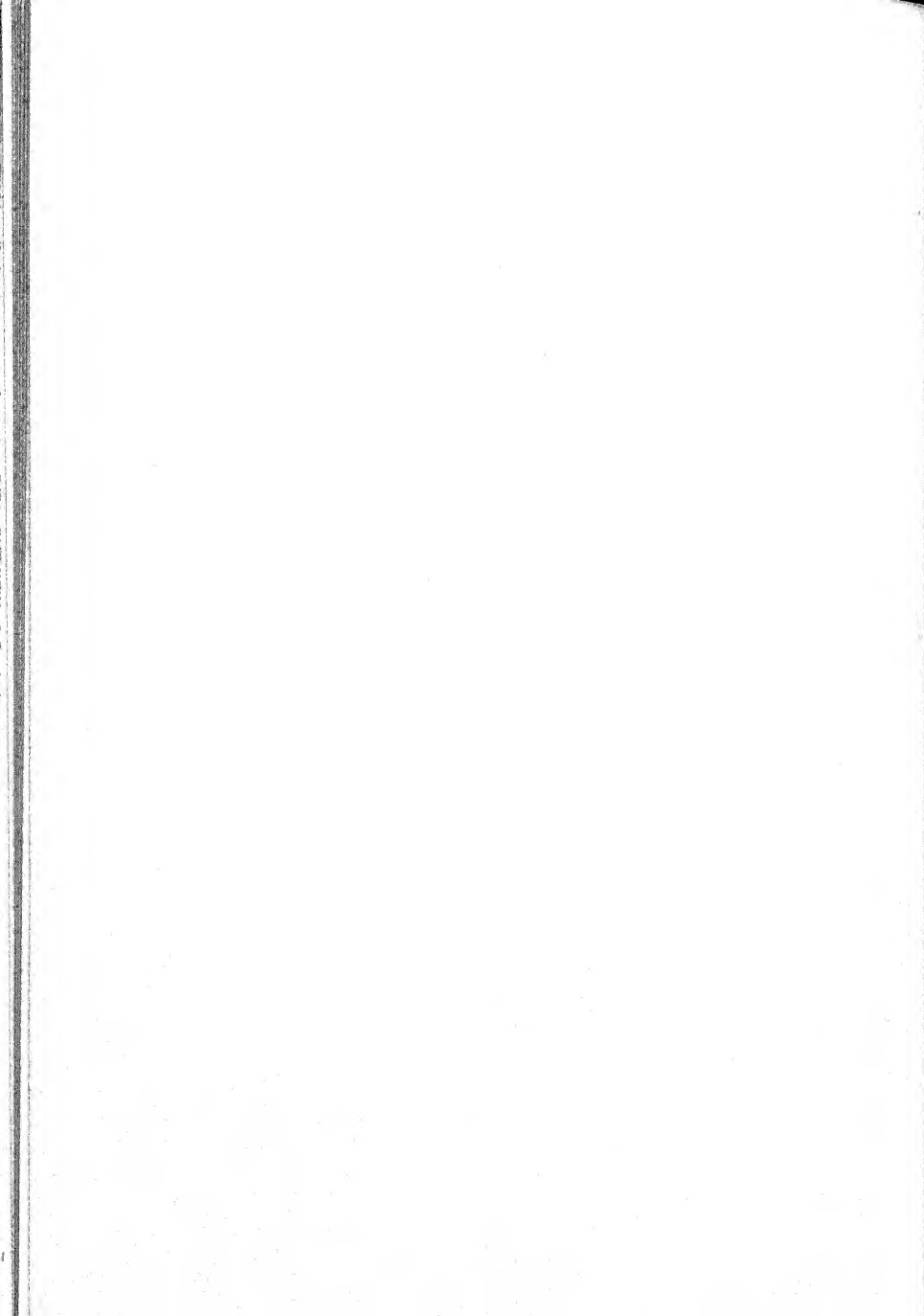
WHAT I WANT MY DAUGHTER TO BE

very much to go and play with my daughter. She, poor innocent, has as yet no conception of the plans I have made for her future; and I feel bound to confess to you that if I am any judge of personality she will probably—before I can put mine into execution—have other determinations of greater importance to her own circle. Nor, it may be, will her mother be entirely free from influence or entirely innocent of opinion. But at least, being a writer, I have this advantage. I have been able with partial coherence to express something of what, in spite of her mother, and in spite of herself, I want my daughter to be. Let due notice be taken of the fact.

1938

## PART THREE





## GOSSIP

EVERY now and then I see in a periodical some little essay upon the subject of talk and talkers, and I learn from these essays that there are people in the world who 'talk' better than others. They are more witty, or they are more jovial; they have a great deal to say which fascinates all who are present, or they do not care to be interrupted when they are in full conversational flight; they toil not, but they spin an endless fabric of good 'talk'. Good 'talk,' it appears, is one of the fine arts of civilization.

Whenever I see such essays I try—as is only natural—to think of those among my friends who could be regarded as good talkers in this special sense, and I always come to the conclusion that perhaps, after all, the best talkers are those who say nothing whatever. How many of us really care deeply for talk as an art? Not many. Most of us would not travel twenty yards, except from morbid curiosity, in order to hear the best so-called 'talkers' in the world. We feel that they must be twigs from that hideous branch of mankind known to all as 'excellent after-dinner speakers,' and, as 'excellent after-dinner speakers' have inflicted their wares upon companies—helpless companies—in which from time to time we have found ourselves, we shall be forgiven if nowadays, at the mention of the sinister phrase, we all fly hastily from the spot.

'Excellent after-dinner speakers,' in fact, are professional acrobats. Their mechanical drolleries appal us. We droop and wither under them. They are among the curses of public

dinners. It is difficult, indeed, to decide whether the dinners or the speakers are the more reprehensible; and it is the same—I am sure—with parties attended by ‘good talkers.’ I would rather have music during a meal—much as I dislike music at meal-time—because during music everybody talks, whereas with the good talkers it would seem that nobody else has a chance to do more than clear an occasional throat. Therefore, as far as I can tell, most of us would very much dislike—and with reason—the ‘good talkers’ who are so much commended by writers of essays upon talk, talking, the art of talking, and the excellence of certain before, during, and after-dinner speakers. We prefer something less overwhelming.

William Hazlitt, I know, once wrote an essay in the course of which he said that when one had once relished the conversation of authors one had no patience with the talk of those who were not authors. It may be so. But the private conversation of authors, as far as my experience goes and in defiance of Hazlitt’s views, is not what would be called by the experts good talk. It is amusing, affable, droll, full of mimicry and extravagance, sharp criticism, and a sort of general, delightful deference to the common good of those who are gathered together. But it is not studied; it could never by any means be fitted into the mould provided by those who speak of the art of conversation. It is too informal for that. It has a far stronger resemblance to the gambolling of kittens, the hedge-munching of horses turned out to grass, the motor-driving of preoccupied and impulsive persons, or the pranks of a dandelion seed upon a breezy day. It has a thousand unexpected turns and is constant only in its vagaries.

I knew a delightful author, whose death his friends still mourn, who could begin by speaking of tobacco ash or sea foam, but who always ended up, by way of heaven, with the music of Mozart, and who was thus never at a loss to reconcile the irreconcilable. Yet he never, even in these flights, was a

monopolist. He loved other men and their secret thoughts too much for that. Indeed, the conversation of authors, like the conversation of most other agreeable people in the universe, does not need any grand names or any elaborate rules. When one sets aside every pretence and every aspiring sophistry of the theorists, the conversation of authors and the conversation of most of those in whose company we take pleasure resolves itself into something which is neither more nor less than plain *gossip*. Authors are very much like other human beings—for authors, although the fact is often forgotten, are at heart human beings like ourselves—and when human beings, whether they are men or women, are gathered for purposes of pleasure and can relax, and so can gratify their most intimate tastes, they are instantly transformed into gossips.

Some may feel that this is a contemptible transformation. I do not hold with such severe fellows. Why should not the wise throw off their studied dignity and gossip unpretentiously to their hearts' content? To me, one who speaks incessantly in epigrams is an exceptionally wearisome companion. He or she could not possibly be said to talk, because the epigrammatist either speaks in monologue or, if challenged by another of his species, very quickly drifts into a contest, the winner of which is the one who scores the highest number of verbal points. Conversational marksmanship, indeed, is an infliction which we all suffer unwillingly and would fain avoid altogether. A person whose talk crackles is, quite frankly, a dislikable person. He is not sociable. He sits at table like a hungry lion in an arena where one or two minor cats, two or three parrots, and a lamb have been gathered together by an anxious circus proprietor. The crackler, or lion, begins by gobbling up the lamb (who has been placed next to him for that very purpose) and he skirmishes thereafter with the cats and the parrots. At the end of a couple of hours the fight is declared over and the lion is

hustled out of the arena. Has a single member of the party derived any pleasure from proximity to the lion? I believe not. If I may speak for the lamb, I would say that she, by being mangled early, has suffered least. And if I were the circus proprietor I would never again attempt to give such a party. In the future, I would invite only my fellow circus proprietors, for then we could talk all the time about circuses and other matters quite close to our hearts. This talk I call gossip.

Gossip is what delights us all. In gossip we deal with everything that is personal to ourselves and personal to those with whom we have some authentic acquaintance. We—if the purist will have it so—chatter. But in chattering we are at ease. We are not striving to appear cleverer than we really are, or more learned. We are not venturing out into fields that we only pretend to know. We are not being ‘intellectual’ or ‘arty.’ We are just saying what comes into our heads and to the tips of our ready tongues about everything that we regard as interesting. The Principles of Good Government, Good Behaviour and Good Health have no place in gossip. Nor has Censoriousness.

Books which we have not read and shall not read, because we could never understand them, do not cause our minds and our words to stumble into inarticulate phrases such as ‘I . . . really, so remarkable . . . I feel that . . . one feels so remarkable . . .’ Efforts to catch the superior tone of our company do not hamper us or carry us into falsehood. We do not say, as did Mr. Snodgrass: ‘The word politics in itself comprises a study of no inconsiderable magnitude,’ nor, like the lady who in *Tancred* rather vaguely described the creation of the earth in the words: ‘First there was nothing, then there was something; then, I forget the next, I think there were shells, then fishes; then we came, let me see, did we come next?’

Instead, we speak of the little things we have noticed or

thought or heard or read, and in return we are told by others about the little things which they also have noticed, thought, heard and read, so that we are happily amused and edified, and we warm beautifully to our friends. We think them wise; we love them. Charming to hope that the discovery is made equally in return about ourselves! Such conversation really does dispel the cobwebs; it really does serve as a distraction. And it makes for love and cordiality between good people. Not for nothing was it the custom in older days to use the word 'gossip' as a term of endearment. Gossips love one another, and above everything else in the world they love what they call 'a good gossip.'

Unfortunately the word 'gossip' is sometimes given a sinister meaning. In the twentieth century in which we live, Tartuffe will purse his lips as he repeats an unsavoury tale, and say: 'Gossip, I suppose,' as if he were saying: 'How I hate the vile thing; or how I should hate it if it did not give me such satisfaction.' Or again, in the daily or weekly press, we find the term applied to all sorts of inaccurate and disagreeable information regarding well known people whose affairs do not concern ourselves, but about whom we are supposed to hunger for private news. The supply, at least, presupposes the hunger, and I remember that a celebrated person was once horrified to read of himself in a popular print: 'Blue spats are coming into fashion. I saw Thomas Thomas last week at Deauville and he was wearing a pair.' Thomas was overwhelmed with protests from his credulous friends who begged him to abandon so grotesque a fashion as the wearing of blue spats; and by the intervention of one of these friends who had learned the truth, the offending author of the paragraph was ultimately traced. 'What do you mean by writing such a paragraph?' she was asked. 'Thomas Thomas has never been to Deauville and he never in his life wore blue spats!' 'Oh, I don't know,' answered the gossipier, shrugging: 'His name just came into my head.'

And with that she turned to her scribbling pad and resumed the writing of another paragraph upon which she was just then engaged.

I am grieved that the word 'gossip' should be given this ill meaning, because injustice is thereby done to a most enjoyable human pastime. Such gossip as I have described as being printed about the great is not gossip at all, but downright lying. And lying cannot possibly be gossip, since it is the essence of good gossip that it should be true. If we are going to lie in our gossip we may as well become professional talkers at once, for amid the real gossips we are as wolves among the lambs, and are introducing to their simple-minded talk all the wickedness of art and corruption, which it is the object of gossip to exclude.

Malice, also, has no part in true gossip. It can be allowed, perhaps, as a very occasional luxury, a sort of caviare in the homes of the middle-class Englishman; but no more. The danger of such an indulgence is that the untrained palate, having once learned to relish caviare, may seek in vinegar or in cheap and common acids the satisfaction of a craving for salt or for astringency. Malice rises from envy, and true gossip must be good-natured and good-humoured. It should make everybody laugh (including the speaker of the moment), but only at an oddity or at a comic aspect, an innocent remark or a strange and amusing sight, never with enjoyment of a fault or an inferiority in other persons. It should not be simply the sort of stuff that dull people reel stupidly out because they can think of nothing better to say. It has nothing to do with such rubbish, for example, as this:

'I see that Mrs. Jones has a green hat. She got it at the Bon Marche for twenty-seven and sixpence and I've seen as good at Little's for eight-and-nine. And it's sure to fade. That green always does. And velvet, too. I should think it weighed half a hundred-weight or thereabouts. But she's very pleased with it, and she says her husband likes it. But her husband—

you know. . . . Well, I saw him myself. *Quite* unsteady. . . . And I'm afraid the boy takes after him, for I saw him—only a mite, you know—in the sweetstuff shop with a glass of ginger-beer. He did drink it quickly. I said to him: "Well, if you drink it as quickly as that, Johnny, you'll be thirsty again in a few minutes." He said: "That's what I like. Then I can have another glass." I told Mrs. Jones—I felt I *ought* to—and she didn't like it at all. She got quite red.' And so on.

Now that, to my mind, is not gossip. It is tattle. It is not gossip, because it is not interesting. Also, it is not gossip, because it is ill-natured. Finally, it is not gossip, because there has been no thought in it. Gossip is not a dull thing, but a lively exercise for lively minds. It is a conversation into the common stock of which the participants throw their choicest impressions. Open hearts, fun, mutual understanding, a dash of irony, and all those invaluable little glances of the mind which belong only to ourselves are needed for good gossip. Not the repetition of stale news, nor of dull tattle, but the quickness, the sportiveness of alert mental contacts. Gossip, indeed, is a sport. It differs from what is described as 'good talk' in the fact that this so-called good talk is conscious and has as its aim, whether that aim be clear or obscure to the marksman, the creating of an effect. Good talk is intended to raise the talker in the eyes of all present. It is far otherwise with gossip. The true gossip does not care for any effect but one—the sense of comradeship, and for that effect he or she will sacrifice everything that is not essential to self-respect, reserve and truthfulness. True gossips are those who unaffectedly pool their little intimate thoughts. It is an irresistible pleasure to them to be together and to share their minds.

By indulgence in this pleasure, as one may discover by acquaintance with a gossip, they grow deliciously wise. I have often seen with delight quiet, calm, smiling, good-tempered looking middle-aged women, their eyes clear and twinkling,



their glances quick and full of knowledge and sympathy; and in every case where opportunity for further discovery has been given I have infallibly reached the born gossip. Such women have immense reserves of understanding; they do not gush out a few scraps of information in a stream of personalities, or fiddle with futile announcements about cook, parlourmaid, or household drudge. Upon such themes they are as dumb as mutes.

But let them get together, with the door closed, tea brewing and a fire at play, and the world in which they spend their days flashes into life before the listener. Though it need not be a large world—neither is there any reason why it should be a small one—it is known to its roots, deep below the surface, down, down, with an accuracy which would be terrifying if it were not so human. Solemnity has no more place in the composition of the true gossip than it has in the heart of a wit; but just as the best kind of frivolity leaps unexpectedly from the brains of the most sagacious of men, so from wise understanding comes the poetry of social intercourse. When we cease to gossip interest in ourselves and our fellow creatures is beginning to perish. By our silence, or our incapacity, we proclaim the fact that we are dead.

## PERPETUAL ROMANCE

DO you like travelling? I do. If the journey is only that of a few miles, it can be crowded with indescribable pleasures of experience. Afoot or afloat, by car or train, all travelling can be enjoyable; but if it takes us among unfamiliar scenes it is doubly so. The town child who goes each summer to the sea learns to treasure all his happinesses *en route*, from the crowd at the railway station to the first gliding movement of the train, the jiggedy-jolt, jiggedy-jolt past grey houses, drab and dun-coloured houses, red houses, and at length to those regions where rich, dusty greens make elysian background for the announcements of pill-makers. He watches the telegraph wires as they rise, tip, droop, and fly up again, from pole to pole; he catches sight of feeding cattle, an enrapturing level crossing, where a trap and a couple of cyclists are waiting, with black shadows upon a white road, for the train to pass; and so, jiggedy-jolt, onward, until the engine whistles screamingly, the train slows down, there is a glimpse of a tiny flower-decked wayside railway station, a slow moving porter with a crimson, country face and stiff legs, and perhaps a calf in a solitary coach standing as if in suspense at the end of the platform; and then the sound of of an exquisite panting tuff, tuff, tuff from that brave engine, echoing in the soft air, while lazy flights of steam disappear skywards. Slowly the train proceeds, gathers speed, and flies towards its goal. There is a bewildering blur of green; a flash of white chalk; more green; more white chalk. The landscape swims past, rather strangely, as if it were circling.

And at last, in the distance ahead, there are houses. Grey roofs, red cocks-comb tiles, here and there a brightness of glass or metal, shining in the afternoon sun.

'We're coming to a town. Look! Look! Is that the sea? Is that . . .'

Jiggedy-jolt, rattle, rattle. . . . The atmosphere seems to be heavily charged with excitement. Those others in the carriage stagger to their feet, and begin thrillingly to collect wraps, bags, and everything portable. All are standing at once, swaying and toppling against each other. A station, larger, darker, dingier than any seen for many miles, abruptly envelops everything. Its dirty roof slides over the train, blackening and extinguishing the carriage and its occupants, almost alarming the travellers, and quite bewildering the youngest of them. There is a thundering of trolleys, porters are to be seen close at hand, a mail-van stands idly by the platform, engines whistle and utter immense ventral roars, and there are so many noises that little hearts beat quite suffocatingly.

'We're there!'

'Is this it?'

'Are we *really* there?'

'All change!' cry the porters. '*All* change! Mind the step, sonny.'

And so, that journey ended, the town child at last has the vision of a glittering something in the distance—a something magical, grey, white, green, blue—all colours, and none. 'The sea!' It is the moment of moments. There is nothing quite to match this sensation. It is not true, as Robert Louis Stevenson once said, that it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, for to those whose capacity for pleasure is still unspoil't the rapture of arrival exceeds everything felt upon the journey.

But if the arrival is the climax, the stages of travel have been marvellously intoxicating; and the burden of sensations

has for some of us been almost unbearably great. Others may dislike the turmoil which attends departure from home, and may resent the hurry and the bustle of great railway stations, the nuisance of baggage, tips, rapid motion, and a sort of internal fluster. But the true traveller either enjoys these details, or makes light of them. He (or she) is agog with the excitement of the day. For him (or for her) there is no such thing as a tedious journey. Each instant is a wonder. From the unnecessary fly upon the carriage window to the gruesome face of a child who has been pressed at the last second into his compartment, from the gritty swimming of the track under his eye to the wild-flowers growing so profusely upon the banks of the railway cutting, all is capable of arousing and sustaining his interest. He is amused at his own mishaps, and concerned at those which bring distress to other people. Above all, to himself, exultantly, he is thinking: 'I'm going! I'm going!' For him everything takes on a new beauty; even the toilers in the fields become picturesque and affecting objects in his rapture of sensation.

And then, there are the incidents of the journey. For the true traveller, even a lunch upon the train is an occasion for tempered joy. It may not be a very good lunch, but let us watch the extraordinary adroitness of those who serve it. How expert they are, in balancing dishes, in mingling disdain with affability! How brisk in making out the little bills, carrying a box of change with them, and shuffling notes and coin with the ease of born croupiers! How gracefully they incline to the motion of the train, and swiftly ply between the tottering tables! One will come with a great pile of plates, and will slap a plate before each passenger. Ere he is gone, another is upon his heels with some part of the meal, and behind this courteous benefactor comes yet a third, bearing some necessary supplement to the dish, such as vegetables, celery, or rolls. Little is spilled, small time is wasted by these magicians. Though the train may be rushing along at in-

credible speed, here all continues as it would continue if there were no movement whatever. As it would all—amazing thought!—continue if we were not present, if we had never been born! Clink, clatter, clatter; there is a jumble of talk, a rattle of dishes, a clink of silver against glass. Outside, the flashing meadows are gone as soon as they are seen, and only distance, gently revolving, remains to give coherence to the journey. The passenger is there, and the distance is there, and if the distance has been changed by the end of the day, so, it must be agreed, has the traveller, who feels that he is already half a stranger to his native land.

I heard once of a lady who spent six months travelling in France and who found, upon her return home (so she said), that she had really quite forgotten her own tongue. The claim was scouted by her cynical relatives, but I think this was only an instance of strong imagination in the lady. So eager, indeed, is the aspiration for travel, and so impressive is the preoccupation with what is to come, that it would never surprise me if I found myself saying '*Merçi*' to a porter at Dover; and there is certainly one friend of mine whom travel so confuses that he is unable to speak any language but Italian in France or any language but French in Italy. He has the sense of travel in what is perhaps an exaggerated degree, but most of us who have crossed the Channel have felt ourselves in something of his predicament. We have ceased to be ourselves, and have become 'something rich and strange,' something peculiarly cosmopolitan, exotic, mysterious. We delight in a new freedom. The different faces and fashions, the blue blouses of the porters, the cries of those who vend fruit far beneath the high carriage windows, the policemen in their unfamiliar uniforms—all are delicacies for the observational palate.

So this is France. France—we are instantly more than half Frenchmen, so peculiarly are we affected by new scents, new lazy sounds and sights. It is for this that we have lived so

long, this romantic strangeness, and the picturesque gesticulations of those groups of French natives which we contemplate with such fraternal interest and appreciation. England lies—in this moment of contact with a new realm—a million miles behind us. We are no longer English, but cosmopolitan. It is a wondrous sensation! Nevertheless, we are frequently quite pleased when the waiter addresses us in our native tongue. We start; we fumble among our French phrases; we capitulate. Our 'foreignness' is still capable, in emergency, of wearing thin. The badge, in large plain lettering, of an English tourist agency is not altogether unlike the reassuring hand of a parent as we venture waist-deep in what, for us, are uncharted seas. But we are exhilarated.

'You have been in France?' said my gentleman, turning quick upon me with the most civil triumph in the world. 'Strange,' quoth I, debating the matter with myself, 'that one-and-twenty miles sailing, for 'tis absolutely no further from Dover to Calais, should give a man these rights. I'll look into them——'

There is much to look into, as Laurence Sterne, who with these words a hundred and sixty years ago began his *Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, was to find. There are the streets across which the train slowly passes; there are the inexhaustible piles of rusty and delapidated objects which lie by the track; there are the meadows far larger and less straitly hedged than those to which we are used; there are the railway stations with enchanting names, and larger stations—such as Amiens—which start a thousand memories; and, glowing in the distance, there is Paris. Paris is by no means, to-day, as it was, but to my eye it will remain a city I knew as a child. I doubt whether any of us can explain why we have such clear visual pictures of foreign cities, although all human beings have them, even regarding places which they have never seen; but in spite of the fact that my experiences of Paris have been very mixed, I think of it

always as in sunshine, with red and white striped awnings pulled out over the pavements, a constant squeaking of those childish little motor horns so beloved of Continental drivers, the cafés full of activity, and the little brass-bound tables outside these same cafés crowded with men and women talking, using their hands and shoulders as additional tongues.

Another city which I shall always think of in sunshine lies well down in the State of Texas. It is called Dallas, and is memorable to me from the fact that I once left Chicago in the depth of Winter, with a temperature of 12 degrees below zero, and after a couple of nights on the train I found myself, at Dallas, in glorious Summer. Here again were the red and white striped sunblinds, wide open French windows, a breeze, and a revivifying warmth. Is it any wonder that Dallas shines out above some more distinguished cities for the warmth? For other reasons, Rome will always, for me, be similarly a memory of brilliant sunshine, a city of deep impressions, full of colour and emotion, even to the unexpectedly-glimpsed gardens which one finds through frowning arches, and to the man who looked like a bank manager, who under my eyes uprooted for his own garden, and took sedately away under his coat, one of some newly-planted scarlet flowers in the Pincian Gardens. My memory of Dresden is that of a charming town in perpetual, exquisite Summer twilight. On the other hand, London is best, I think, when day fades into evening during October, when shadows are rising and the big lights begin to pop up before the sky has quite lost its opal. New York in crisp early Winter afternoons, when one can see something of the lengths of the Avenues, and in dusk also, when, from the ferry to New Jersey, all outlines are lost and only the lighted windows of the tall buildings, like dim lanterns, hang mysteriously in the murk.

These are cities that may be described as the goals of travel. There are so many others, beautiful and full of association,

that one could travel a lifetime in search of them. And what travel! Are there not many of us who can be content, in sickness, with a map and a time-table? In such hours we travel much, in imagination; our minds range, our memories and imaginations are stirred. We recall the often inexpressible details of early journeys; we dwell upon the innumerable scents that we remember—from that of coffee to that of those crescent rolls which are the undiscovered little secret of Continental bakeries. There comes back to us the German railway train in which a fellow-passenger stood up all night long, playing his violin; the extraordinary home-sickness caused by the sight of those soft green hills near the Californian coast; hot and dusty French and Belgian roads along which we have tramped under the broiling heat of the sun.

But indeed memories of journeys are magic things. Who that has travelled will ever forget waking up, en route for Rome, with the blue waters of the Gulf of Genoa close beside the coach. Who will forget the thrill of that heavy, squealing stop at Pisa, where the *carabinieri* stand silently in the early daylight, and each railway official looks more like a *genera-lissimo* than the last? Who, unmoved, can decipher the name, 'Avignon' or 'Dijon' in the darkness, or hear the hoarse note of an American railway train as it makes its adventurous journey across the great continent? The mere noises of the railways of the world would suffice a student for many months, from the toy trumpets of the Continental guards to this same hoarse roar of the American engine, rousing fear and excitement in the darkness. The white-jacketed negroes of the American sleeping-cars, the trim chocolate uniform of the attendants upon the Blue Train, and the blue uniforms of those who serve upon the great liners, are likewise material for a hundred cogitations. Who will ever forget the bursting roar which seems to issue from the bowels of a liner as she prepares to leave dock, or as she slows down in mid-Atlantic, enveloped in thick fog, while silence,



more terrifying than any answering roar could be, echoes about her in space? These vast ships, going and returning across the seas during the whole of each year, are in themselves a fantasy; and when one remembers how crowded with incident are the days spent on board them, it may well be that a trans-Atlantic trip is among the most extraordinary experiences which can be enjoyed by the majority of men. But whether one travels by land or sea, there is still no end to the pleasures and the pleasurable excitements of such travel, and he must be dead indeed to both pleasure and excitement who does not respond to the bell, the trumpet, the whistle, or the roar that announces departure.

An American friend of mine has told me how, as a boy, he has spent many happy hours in the docks of his native city, watching great ships coming slowly in, seeing them lie there for a few days, and attending their magical resumption of the sea. I myself, as a child, used to wait in a favourable spot in order to see the railway train known as the 'Flying Scotsman' thunder northward in the evening, with sparks shooting like fireworks from the engine's funnel. To be at Southampton when a liner comes or goes, guided and bumped by those little tugs which reduce some watchers to laughter and tears by their appearance of heroic impudence; or to see those same liners at the other end of the world, undergoing similarly rough treatment, and swaying fabulously to the landing stage, is to catch the spirit of travel in its full flight. To be on board one of these liners, with all the tremors of arriving or departing, is to experience almost tragic delight. A moment either way, and the liner will be, or has been, a home for several crowded days. More than a home, in fact, for we are too well acquainted with stout walls and roofs to feel that they withstand the weather by miracle; while aboard ship we hardly ever cease to marvel at the endurance by means of which we are carried safely from port to port.

Everything attending a sea voyage, in fact, is indescribably marvellous. The embarkation, so casual and so leisurely, marked by extraordinary invasions on the part of non-travellers, who swarm upon the decks and visit all the cabins, and by great performances by hard-working cranes which in large nets sweep masses of baggage from the landing stage to the ship, is like a dream. We enter what seems to be an immense hotel, where lifts carry us all day and every day up and down from deck to deck. We explore our staterooms, and scan eagerly the ingenuities by which we are to be surrounded for the journey. We climb to the upper decks, and survey the brilliant crowds gathered to watch our departure. That heavy, shuddering roar of warning, the rumbling of chains, and the running of sailors who have their caps strapped beneath their chins, add to our excitement. The gangways are removed. There is a breathless pause. Then the shore takes on a peculiar uncertainty. We are moving. Handkerchiefs are waved. There is a continuous fluttering. A thousand voices fill our ears. We are off!

Deep below us, the waters are fluttering about the sides of the ship, wavelets coming and going in remote ripples. We forge onward, very slowly, very majestically. The shores move more rapidly. They reveal astonishing glimpses of a land we have never seen. We go farther and farther. All the fluttering kerchiefs swim together. We stand watching the receding land with hearts that sink a little. Presently, as if exhausted, but in reality because the truth of our adventure is coming home to us, we begin to find the air chilly, and move about. We pace the decks, or we go to our staterooms. The little beds make us smile, and the little tablets which tell us what to do if the ship is sinking or on fire make us feel sober again. We are conscious of the faintest motion as the ship encounters currents stronger than those of safe harbourage. The wind freshens. There are strange new scents to be noted. It may be that we hear the bugler summoning

us to the first meal to be taken aboard ship. His call is repeated at intervals. Although we do not immediately recognize the fact, we shall grow to dislike that bugler, and some of us (before the voyage is out) will plot to murder him and throw his corpse as a meal to the following seagulls.

These gulls—or their cousins—will appear to follow the ship wherever she goes. They will swoop and fly, float in the air or upon the water, in our wake for many days. And as the hours pass we shall grow accustomed to the body-guard, and at length, when we are ashore, we shall miss these silent, only occasionally screaming birds which have been our constant companions across the rolling seas. We shall grow used, also, to the occasional shudder of the ship as her screw comes above the surface of the water, and to the miraculous spectacle of a grey line, rising and falling, which will greet us each morning through our portholes as we awaken and will bid us farewell each evening as the sun sinks and the daylight fades.

If we have admired the dexterity of the stewards upon railway trains, we shall admire tenfold the dexterity of those who serve us at sea. We shall grow hardened to the sudden rushes of china upon heaving tables, and to the shivering slap of spray against the portholes of the dining saloon as the ship is struck by larger waves. Upon deck or below, we shall notice the accompaniments of a sea journey, the good-humour of most of those who travel, the powerful breeze, the lurching of our beds, the long regularity of the days. We shall read or idle, play ship games or walk religiously for exercise—three times or seven times or eleven times round the deck at a bout—make friends with exceptional ease, sleep amazingly. Each morning as the regular roar announces the arrival of mid-day, we shall hurry to discover the ship's record for the previous twenty-four hours; and after a time we shall be aware that there is a stir among all those with whom we speak. Already they are beginning to

discuss one subject, and one subject only. The steward will hazard a prophecy; the deck-steward will smile as it is repeated to him; a rumour runs round the ship that the captain, interrogated, has admitted that if this wind and weather hold, we *may*. . . . At last little notices are posted announcing that large baggage must be packed by such and such an hour. Glasses are levelled; expert travellers recognize indications, gather together, and knowingly claim to have the power to get ashore and through the customs, by some legerdemain, before the common herd. It does not prove that their tales are true; but no matter. All passes the time, and arouses the excitement. And in the end, either at night or in the morning, we catch some distant shadow upon the horizon. It is land.

If departures are frequently sad, arrivals have few sorrows. For most of us few disappointments. I have seen the Alps in the early morning, with Mont Blanc standing clear of clouds (a sight which Disraeli found so marvellous—and so rare—a hundred years ago) and have learned that nothing, not even the most grotesque of picture-postcards, can vulgarize the reality. I have seen Lisbon rising early in the dawn, and the Golden Horn at San Francisco in the gorgeousness of full day. I have confronted the celebrated New York skyline when the morning atmosphere was at its best for the first glimpse. I have travelled through the Roman Campagna in both sunshine and shadow. And I have watched light-houses still winking upon the Cornish and Devonian coastline as the night receded and the morning came, and have reached Plymouth when the brilliant greens of the land were drenched in the warmth of a blazing December sun. Others, perhaps, have had a far greater range of travel experience than myself, but for me the sight of the English coast in the dawn is all magic.

I put not least among the pleasures of travel, indeed, the supreme pleasure of returning home. In my experience one starts out with zest. The dropping of the Liverpool pilot off

Holyhead, at night, in a dark and rolling sea—the first I ever saw climbed nimbly down an endless rope-ladder, wearing, in defiance of wind and weather, a little hard felt bowler hat—is a glorious experience, alone repaying every effort made on behalf of the holiday. One journeys onward, with sensations deepening and accumulating into memory of unsurpassed delight. One arrives. That arrival, as we have seen, is the climax of travel. But then, upon the return journey, home is not merely a place to which one relapses. To reach home again is in every sense a major arrival. Marvel-filled as is the outward journey, that which brings us back again contains the greatest marvel of all. For we learn afresh, at each return, that when travelling is over there is no place in the world which has quite the same appeal to our sense of the marvellous as the place we left a few days, a few weeks, a few months earlier with such anticipations of what we should see with our backs to our native land.

## CHARLADIES

MOST of the charladies to be met with in novels and plays are comic characters. They talk ungrammatically and copiously about 'me spasms,' murders, child-birth, and such-like horrors. Some of them sport comic black eyes ('me ole man come 'ome drunk agin larce night'), suffer from palpitation of the heart or a love of something contained in little bottles, write letters which they formally sign 'Mrs. Clapper' or 'Mrs. Sniggs,' and as a whole derive less from life than from that celebrated but imaginary creature Sairey Gamp.

On the stage they are often film-struck or anæmic, and make audiences laugh by creeping dismally from wing to wing, sniffing or wiping their noses with the back of their hands, leaving pails and mops to be tripped over, and uttering proverbial wisdom with ridiculous mispronunciations. They speak of their haricot veins, of their master's whereabouts having been sent to the wash, and, as if underclothes were so-called from a habit of loitering, of their lingerie. They are nearly always bedraggled creatures who look like last year's scarecrows.

This ridicule of a whole class does not mean that novelists and dramatists hate charladies, but only that the novelist and dramatist is never quite master of his own book or his own play. Just as—this is the oft-told tale which you have certainly heard—he must be funny when his heart is breaking, so, less sentimentally, when jokes and fancies and subtleties are mischievously thrusting themselves to the very tip of his

pen, he has to repel them and subject himself, and others, to poignant distress because certain imaginary characters are in an irremediable pickle.

Now in real life the most appalling absurdities are visibly woven in with tragic events as a part of the same pattern; but in books and plays, by a paradox, the writer who reproduced this fantastic pattern would disgust his readers by apparently heartless flippancy, and he often has not the courage to take such a risk. Instead, unless in the modern fashion he despises everybody but himself and becomes a mere grammarian, he more and more strictly simplifies his pattern and deals with only one thing at a time.

He specializes. Like the shirt-makers, he has private designs. Black and white. Grim and gay. While ready to be woeful for whole scenes and chapters upon end, he tries to lighten the overwhelming solemnity of his art by a blessed thing called comic relief. And since all novelists and dramatists without genius, when not being grim about the bitter, tortured lives of the poor, are usually being mortally serious about middle-class people entangled by Fate, the only comic relief that he can invoke depends less upon the invention of side-splitting situations than upon the manners and speech of recognizably comic characters. That is, upon characters who would not exist at all if they were not needed as foils to those more beautiful, sensitive, unhappy, harassed, and important than themselves.

It is the business of all such comic characters to say and do things so extravagant that the slowest-witted reader or theatre-goer can instantly see that they are *meant* to be funny. And nothing strikes a stupid person as more ridiculous than a way of life different from his own. A foreigner is always amusing; a yokel is a sure-fire laughter-maker; and in olden days domestic servants who aped their betters, carried and mixed private messages, used long wrong words, were vulgar, and generally made fools of themselves, were very

popular indeed—almost inevitable. Nowadays nobody, for fear of domestic servitude, dares to laugh openly at domestic servants; but the charlady, an unprotected godsend to ready writers, conveniently fills the post of general butt. Unfortunate creature!

She has innumerable uses. She can appear in any room in any garb at any time of day. She can look at teatime as if she had just been sweeping the flues. Her mop and pail can trip as easily before dinner as before lunch. She can make preposterous mistakes while waiting at table, or herself be mistaken for another guest by some purblind visitor and supplied with melancholy back-chat enough for any timely purpose. She can gossip, reveal secrets, pick letters from waste-paper baskets and read them aloud to herself (with charming errors due to her elementary ignorance of punctuation), and in a thousand other ways persuade a reader or onlooker that if there are no longer fairies in the world there are at least trolls, gnomes, and grotesques belonging to a different animal order from himself. We cannot wonder that she is so great a favourite.

Not all charladies in real life, however, are comic characters. Some are tragic. All, though these are not what the novelists depict, have their darker aspects; and if one could know the private history of even one real charlady one might find it a page fit for inclusion in the *Comédie Humaine* of a modern Balzac. But nobody will ever know the private history of a char. They keep nearly all their secrets to themselves. For this reason I am sure that, whatever novelists and dramatists pretend, they are not natural chatterboxes. Not all have black eyes or drunken husbands who occasionally arrive for a private quarrel or, in times of hardship for the hero, become comic brokers' men. Their Malapropisms are few. They are frequently sturdy, silent, careful, and as dignified as wealthy aunts, who, by the way, are also with as little reason made ridiculous in some books and plays. They are, for the most



part, as much unlike the charladies of fiction as you and I are unlike Punch and Judy.

They are also unlike each other. They may be good or middling or very very bad; but they will be as different as pork and peas. Some, I regret to say, are petty thieves. Young and fashionable ladies have before now missed—temporarily or permanently—their choicest backless *lingerie*, and in the circumstances have strongly preferred total loss to restoration. Food and stockings and spoons and toys have on their day been safely tucked into those little mystic bundles which all charladies carry. Many a lump of sugar and many a spoonful of tea has sunk without trace, together with many a stray copper and many a trinket of convenient size. But for all this a dishonest charlady is one of the rarest calamities in domestic life, for a reason which I shall tell you in a moment; and as a class they supply constant proof of the high standard of decency attained by English working people. No 'slimness,' no scrounging, no pilfering soil the records of most of them; but on the contrary they have an embarrassing habit of making small spontaneous gifts, from cake to bargain liqueur glasses, gramophone records and beautiful pictures which no conjuration can dissolve. Indeed, if all men and women were as honest and as generous as the best kind of char, we should have a tolerably decent world, full of inconvenient possessions.

And possibly an ultra-genteel world; for I have known some charladies, as fastidiously honest as women can be, to dress in very select black, manicure their nails, carry their overalls and aprons in attaché cases, and be so much ashamed of their craft that they pretended all the while to be engaged in daily secretarial duties. These dandified women were perhaps not the best chars in the country; but at least they kept their finery for the outer world and did as good a job of work within doors as they could. They were much to be preferred to their first cousins, who, solemn as owls, refused to demean

themselves by sparing a single word—beyond a disapproving, tight-lipped ‘Morning’—to their unworthy employers, and accepted instructions with a mere stiff inclination of the head. ‘No truckling’ was the motto of these aristocrats. ‘A lady *always*’ was their secret key to conduct. With noses in mid-air, they inefficiently swept dust under the bed or into a corner behind the door and left their mistresses, a little cowed, to do the dirty work. One such reported long ago that she had contradicted a protesting victim with the crushing words: ‘“Mr. Parsons,” I said; “Mr. Parsons, you’re nothing but a myth!”’ A useful rejoinder.

Still among the superior, there are some charladies who glance sideways at plated silver with a slight turn of the lip as if in their own homes they used nothing but the real thing. These are the women who in pre-married days have been employed in high-class service and who accordingly suffer from service snobbery. They clean with almost open derision, as if one’s furniture were fit only for the local rummage sale; and although they are often able workers they cause their employers so much chagrin and suppressed indignation that some mistresses will move rather than endure any longer a glance under which happiness withers and pleasure in possessions is violated.

Whether the scornful, however, are to be preferred to the left-handed is another matter. For the left-handed manage to leave every picture, every chair, every clock, ornament or coal-scuttle askew. The mats and rugs look appallingly drunk; the curtains hang in debauch; the flowers have all fallen over; the poker lies as if it had been unable to keep its legs for another moment. ‘Done’ by these chars, rooms give the appearance of having been swept by a minor tornado.

As for the over-active, they hustle and rub and polish with the modern mania for speed at all costs, so that all china is chipped, any delicate furniture is liable to lose a leg

or an arm, and the entire home may at any moment fall into crashing ruin. These are the most menacing charladies of all. Their power is that of brute strength. They are like bulls in china-shops, or elephants in conservatories; wherever they lay hands upon a thing they do so with a vengeance, executing rough justice and imperilling civilization. Hearty, good-humoured, but ruthless, they cause us to wonder in vain what their own homes can be like, and if their utensils are all of iron or if their cups and jugs are handle-less, their chairs and beds broken, and their remaining furniture battered by long pounding into unrecognizable pulp. Nobody can tell us. Nobody ever sees the mysterious homes of charladies.

Now there is nothing intrinsically comic in any of these types; each one of them may or may not be amusing as an individual, but they do not all belong to any comprehensive order of beings, and we rarely find them represented in books or on the boards. They are all different, and all serious. And there are other types still, less familiar, but warrantably genuine. I knew a charlady once, a small dark woman who worked well and quietly and who, during a short illness of my own, acted with the greatest possible efficiency as nurse. Her favourite author was H. G. Wells in his most sociological mood. She was a believer in the League of Nations before the League of Nations came into being; she had very clear ideas as to what was wrong with the world and with human nature; and she eventually became a member of her District Council, which she greatly adorned.

I knew another who, when the groceries came home, unexpectedly clapped the vinegar bottle to her lips, drank heartily from it, and, as she put the bottle down, panted grossly: 'I do *love* winnedar!'

I knew a third whose husband had fallen incurably ill, and who became not so much a charlady as the loyal friend and benefactress of those for whom she worked; who from the depths of great grim humour produced an atmosphere

of unfailing cheerfulness, and who kept her home going by means of superhuman work until her son, a character equally fine, had become foreign correspondent to his employers and was able to take charge of the family fortunes.

I knew a fourth whose knowledge of all the seamier aspects of life in a London suburb was inexplicable until it was one day discovered that she was the wife of an advancing policeman; a fifth who waddled dirty-handed in and out of rooms snapping her fingers like a trick-dancer and muttering, unconscious of the fact that she spoke aloud: 'Let 'em get on with it!'; and a sixth who, having started work at the age of ten and gone into service shortly afterwards as one of what the Admirable Crichton called 'the odds and ends,' had reared a family upon next to nothing and given every one of her children a good education; and who in years of maturity could yield most cultured women a start in the matter of general knowledge and quickness of mind and lose them with the greatest possible ease. Where is the resemblance between these women which would suggest that the char is a predestined comic character? There is none.

The reason for every discrepancy between charladies is that they are made and not born. They are nearly always married women, with young children, whose expectations of domestic security in marriage have been disappointed. They may be widows, grass widows (I mean, women deserted by their husbands), wives with sick or unemployed men at home, or pensioners. The majority are very respectable persons who, finding, while still young and active enough to work with their hands, that they cannot make ends meet upon their husbands' earnings, determine to do the only kind of practical work which produces invaluable shillings and leaves them time to keep their own homes clean and to prepare midday or early evening meals for their children. The work may be hard; it is certainly not always well-paid; but for a poor woman of character who has the use of her limbs

it has much else to recommend it. Hence the making of the charlady. Hence, too, some of the odd misfits of which I have given a few examples. One becomes a char from need, and not for ambition.

Apart from their determination not to let their homes slide into decay, charladies have but one quality in common, which is that they go out to work by the hour or day in other women's homes or the flats of bachelors. They get their children off to school, scabble through a little house-cleaning, pack their bundles and set forth upon the day's adventure to this other home and that, to Mrs. Winks on Tuesday and Mrs. Podge on Thursday, to Mr. Toots, it may be, every morning, and Miss Poots every other afternoon. They work in each of these places for an hour or two, draw their pay, and as often as not hurry home to prepare some sort of meal for hungry schoolchildren. Sometimes they stay out at work all day long, and the children take little nosebags to school or feed with a neighbour, while our char returns home in time to boil the water for tea before she begins a washing or makes the beds and polishes her own stove and her own tumblers and saucepans. She, unlike her employers, is without domestic help—she has not even a charlady—and must start from the beginning. She may go out to work one day a week, or two or three or six days. But for her, at home and abroad, such work is all one and the same kind of work, and it is never-ending.

She serves bachelors, in my experience, particularly well; and my London char, who came to me each morning after an earlier job with a dressmaker living a mile away, used often to bring flowers to brighten a dingy flat, leave witty notes, and perform miracles with a coal fire which I found still alight many hours afterwards. She was a treasure: and she is still a cause of marvel. I do not pretend, I cannot pretend, that she was anything other than exceptional. But other charladies who take to their gentlemen are within

distance of this one. They develop a not dissimilar vicarious house-pride. They do a little cooking, they keep an eye upon the primitive store-cupboard, they produce mouse-exterminators, magic corkscrews and darning wool, and they add a spot of private laundering to their comprehensive work. They mend. They shop. They mother.

If they do less than this for their women employers, that is because, as a rule, they feel less protective to members of their own sex, and may go so far as to think some of them rather fortunate. The relation is a different one, and upon both sides it is more critical. A bachelor may prefer his home to be somewhat of a den; a woman will often show morbid concern over the dusting of a mantelpiece. A man prides himself upon his good nature; a woman upon her scrupulousness. A man relies upon his char; a woman, who by the way is more often at home while the work is being done than the man can ever be, insists upon supervising. But charladies will do much for women also, if they like them; and it is upon this point that all service, good, bad and indifferent, turns. Do your servants like you? The charlady, at heart, resembles ourselves. She prefers to be treated, within reason, as if she were human. Is she to blame for that?

Mistresses sometimes, from egotism, from jealousy, from thoughtlessness, treat the charlady as if she were something just horridly emerged from her own pail. Too many of them think of her as 'she,' or as 'the woman,' considering her a lump of muscle paid to do all the more disagreeable work of the house and then depart to limbo. They make no effort to discover what lies behind a grim or reckless manner; but condescend, order and enforce obedience by snubbery. Such women abuse a power which they enjoy only by the day. It is too bad of them. Or, being alone and in search of distraction, they gossip, grow too confidential, take alarm at their own unwisdom, resent the freedom they have encouraged, try to scramble back to dignity, quarrel and dis-

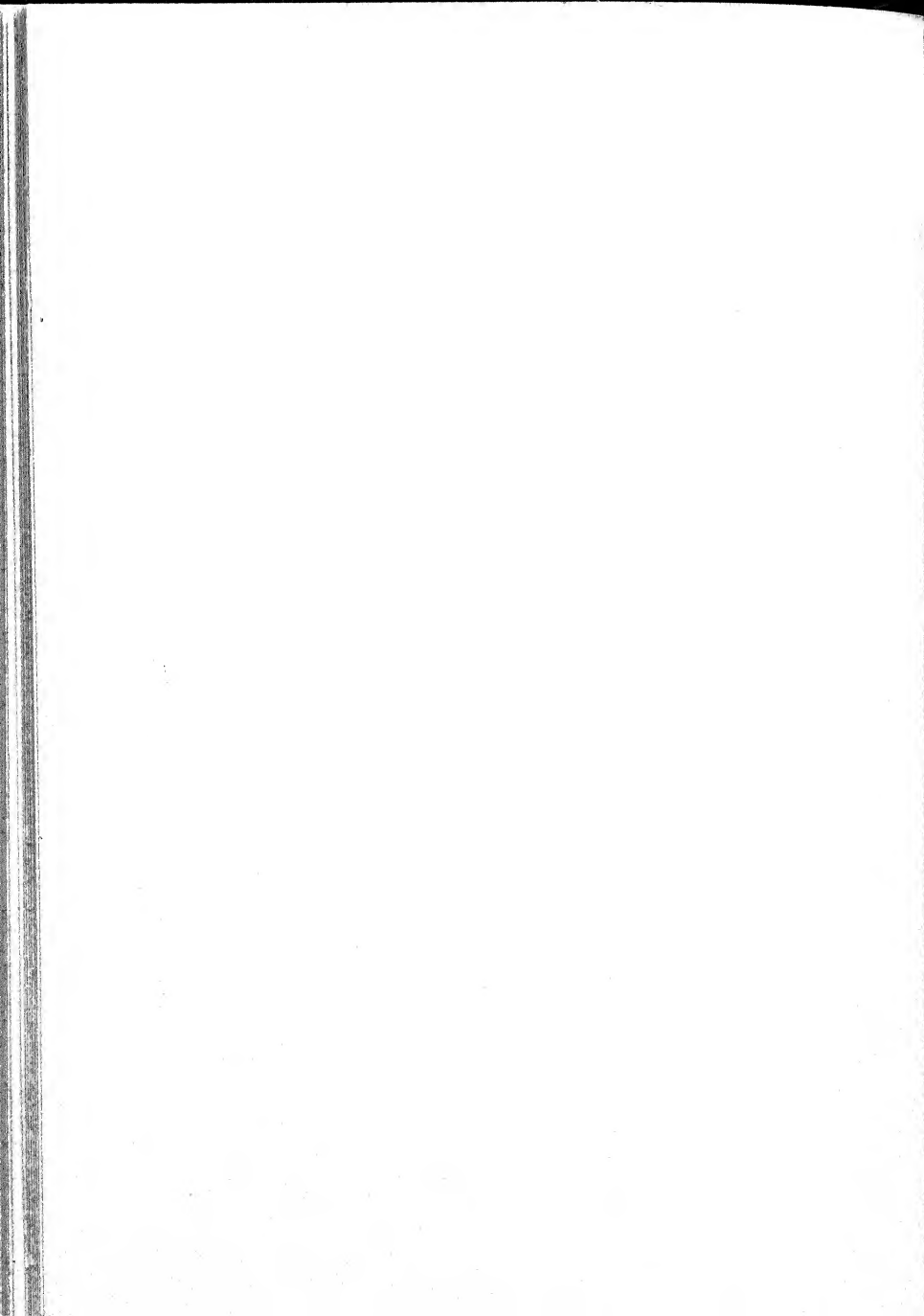
miss their charladies. Or, being themselves energetic, they use the charlady as nothing but an extra pair of ill-paid hands granted to them as a matter of course, command, lead and expect her to be as enthusiastic about scouring a house which is not her own as they are about showing their rivals a speckless domain. It is unimaginative of them. The house is not her own. The moment she is bullied it becomes a penitentiary.

These mistresses should remember one thing. The charlady goes out to work for her own ends. She cannot, unless from affection for her employer, develop for any strange home that sense of pride in its appearance that one may expect from a good servant in secure employment. She cannot in any circumstances be more than a stranger to the bric-à-brac, or a visitor to the kitchen. If she does not like her mistress, nothing but a feeling of duty or of self-respect will cause her to work well; and if the work she does in one house is no different from the work she does in another she might just as well be on the treadmill all day long for the amount of satisfaction she can take in her charing. Mistresses who reckon nothing of this are foolish to demand perfection. They are foolish to think that they can force interest. They only invite a stubborn resistance to their own will; and I do not wonder that charladies, much tried by snicks and snaps of petty tyranny, and sometimes by the kind of sarcastic bitterness administered by mistresses of the sort I have in mind, occasionally turn upon such ladies. I should turn myself. And if no turn occurs it is probably because the charlady, having weighed the chances, knows that she needs their money too badly to throw it away. If it were lost she would be back again in Queer Street. In that case how can one expect the devotion of the old retainer?

Well, I fear the charlady has no real hope of escape from the category of comic characters. She is innumerable, and therefore she is cheap. She is not independent because she cannot afford to be independent. The more unsettled the

labour market is, the more readily is she to be found. She cannot strike; she cannot, *en masse*, rebel; she can do nothing but gain or lose the few odd hours which she at present enjoys of necessary labour. And so she is easy fun for the novelist and dramatist whose notion of humour is jocularity; and we shall continue to read about her or see her straggling across the stage, wearing ragged rabbit-skins about her neck and hats like birds' nests, canvas aprons, wedding-rings and sloppy shoes, carrying herself as if she were either a female pugilist or a living advertisement of failure to take Cheeryble Salts. She will exhibit to the end of the chapter all the meaner horrors of domestic human nature, from garrulity and inquisitiveness to verbal affectation and pigeon-toes. Poor woman, she has no redress! All that those of us who respect her can do is to make whenever possible a plea that she should be considered as an individual, and not abandoned without protest to the twin infamies of slavery and ridicule.





## A BEDSIDE BOOK

THE first essential of a bedside book is that it should tranquillize the mind. What better bedside book could there be, then, than one which mingles universal truth with fancy, and at imperceptible points crosses the boundary between the world we know and the world of dreams? I know of none. I know that in reading Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* I recapture childhood's delight in fairy tales, that I am taken into delicious little odd corners of understanding and fun, and that while I sometimes laugh aloud at what I read the effect of the book as a whole is one of such smiling happiness that I can close my eyes, see and think of nothing but half-poetic images, and fall blissfully asleep.

For other moods, of course, and for other natures, books of a different order must be found; and to relish *The Wind in the Willows* at all one must certainly possess the English kind of humour, a love of small and young things, and a willingness to yield to fancy. The logical mind, which says 'Who ever heard an animal talk like this?' or the glib modernist mind, which calls every ascent of the imagination 'escapism,' might well fail to be amused by a tale of three or four animals who live underground, row boats, write poetry, go caravanning, drive motor-cars, get put into prison, and in times of battle carry lethal weapons. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the philosophies of these superior spirits.

But I have committed treachery to *The Wind in the Willows*

by calling its heroes 'three or four animals.' One does not so think of them. They are Mole, Ratty, Toad, and Mr. Badger; and while Mole, simple and likeable, and Ratty, shrewd to the bone in spite of his habit of 'doing poetry,' are sometimes little animals and sometimes children and sometimes well-grown schoolboys camping and pretending, there can be no doubt, I think, that Toad—some call him Mr. Toad—is in a sense all mankind.

I mean that he is all of us at our most unguarded, our most impulsive, boastful, and collapsible. He escapes from trouble only to become idiotically conceited; and in the grip of conceit he plunges dementedly into a more ghastly scrape than the last. From all these plunges, these fortunate rescues, and these lessons he buoyantly emerges, full of self-reproach and self-complacency, and he learns nothing from experience. As a result his life has the variety of a kaleidoscope, and it needs the concerted effort of his three devoted but critical friends, Mole, Ratty, and Badger, to save him from the consequences of his own folly. They do this from love, which shows how excellent some of Toad's traits are; and they do it from duty, for they are noble animals; and they do it for fun, because that is the kind of creature each one of them is.

We first meet Mole in the act of white-washing his home. But Mole feels the call of the Spring; and after scratching his way to the surface of a great meadow he travels onward—taking the reader, also, into the open air—until, at last, he reaches the river. And as he sits looking across it he sees a dark hole in the opposite bank, in which twinkles something bright and small, which proves to be the eye of the Water Rat. What a momentous meeting! They become friends at sight; the Rat rows his little blue boat over the river, offers a fore-paw and commands the Mole to 'step-lively'; and the two are afloat together. The Mole, with the manly candour which endears him to us all, confesses that he has never before been in a boat.

'What?' cried the Rat, open-mouthed. 'Never been in a—you never—well, I—what have you been doing, then?'

'Is it so nice as all that?' asked the Mole shyly, though he was quite prepared to believe it as he leant back in his seat and surveyed the cushions, the oars, the rowlocks, and all the fascinating fittings, and felt the boat sway lightly under him.

'Nice? It's the only thing,' said the Water Rat solemnly as he leant forward for his stroke. 'Believe me, my young friend, there is *nothing*—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing,' he went on dreamily: 'messing—about—in—boats; messing——'

'Look ahead, Rat!' cried the Mole, suddenly.

It is with the introduction of Toad that *The Wind in the Willows* becomes unique, as bed-book, children's book, or any other kind of book; for Toad is a character drawn in the grand manner by a master. He is the unworthy son of a wealthy and sagacious father; and, having already tired of sailing, punting, house-boating, and wager-boating, he now turns with passion to a bright yellow gipsy caravan which is immediately flung derelict into a ditch by a passing motor-car. From this moment Toad craves possession only of something akin to 'that swan, that sunbeam, that thunderbolt' which has caused the accident. While yet numb with shock, he murmurs: 'Glorious, stirring sight! The poetry of motion! The *real* way to travel! The *only* way to travel! Here to-day—in next week to-morrow!' He has been seized by the demon of Speed.

Successive cars and successive smashes bring about his downfall. Though his friends try to save him, he runs from their protective restraint; and as he flies he is tempted by the sound and sight of a stationary and empty car, and after thoughtful examination of its externals he is visited by a fatal thought. 'I wonder,' he says to himself, 'I wonder if this sort of car *starts* easily?' In another moment he is a

criminal. He is in the grip of a passion which he cannot master:—

As if in a dream, he pulled the lever and swung the car round the yard and out through the archway; and, as if in a dream, all sense of right and wrong, all fear of obvious consequences, seemed temporarily suspended. He increased his pace, and as the car devoured the street and leapt forth on the high road through the open country, he was only conscious that he was Toad once more, Toad at his best and highest, Toad the terror, the traffic-queller, the Lord of the lone trail, before whom all must give way or be smitten into nothingness and everlasting night.

Alas, we next meet Toad before the Bench of Magistrates, by whom he is sentenced to twelve months for theft of the car, three years for dangerous driving, and fifteen years for cheeking the police, with another year added to make a round twenty, and—

Then the brutal minions of the law fell upon the hapless Toad; loaded him with chains, and dragged him from the Court House, shrieking, praying, protesting; across the market-place, where the playful populace, always as severe upon detected crime as they are sympathetic and helpful when one is merely 'wanted,' assailed him with jeers, carrots, and popular catch-words; past hooting school children, their innocent faces lit up with the pleasure they ever derive from the sight of a gentleman in difficulties; across the hollow-sounding drawbridge, below the spiky portcullis;

and so to the remotest dungeon in the best-guarded keep of the stoutest castle in all the length and breadth of Merry England.

How Toad escapes in the guise of an old washerwoman; how he obtains a ride upon an engine which is desperately pursued, jumps for safety, hides, finds refuge upon a barge, steals the barge-horse and sells it to a gipsy, and commits the unspeakable folly of again seizing and wrecking a motor-car,

I need only mention. What is much more important in its effect upon his character is that upon arrival home he finds that in his absence Toad Hall has been captured by all the stoats, ferrets, and weasels in the Wild Wood, and that he is homeless.

He has only three friends, Badger, Rat, and Mole, and although it takes some time to check the natural levity of his mind, his boastfulness, the crass folly with which he still, in the midst of misfortune, hugs the thought of his own supercleverness, these three at last bring him to reason. They determine, armed to the teeth, to use a secret underground passage known only to Badger; and, when the interlopers are merry at a banquet, to deliver an overwhelming surprise attack.

It is an unqualified triumph.

My!

What a squealing and a squeaking and a screeching filled the air!

Well might the terrified weasels dive under the tables and spring madly up at the windows! Well might the ferrets rush wildly for the fireplace and get hopelessly jammed in the chimney! Well might tables and chairs be upset, and glass and china be sent crashing on the floor, in the panic of that terrible moment when the four Heroes strode wrathfully into the room. The mighty Badger, his whiskers bristling, his great cudgel whistling through the air; Mole, black and grim, brandishing his stick and shouting his awful war-cry, 'A Mole! A Mole!' Rat, desperate and determined, his belt bulging with weapons of every age and every variety; Toad, frenzied with excitement and injured pride, swollen to twice his ordinary size, leaping into the air and emitting Toad-whoops that chilled them to the marrow!

The author significantly remarks: 'The affair was soon over.' The terrific end of it has the inevitability of Homeric combat.

Now I have not yet spoken of a number of favourite passages in *The Wind in the Willows* which are ideal reading for the end of the day. I must endeavour to do so. There is Rat's meeting, for example, with the Seafaring Rat, who salutes him with a gesture of courtesy that has something foreign about it, whose paws are long and thin, whose eyes are much wrinkled at the corners, and who wears small gold ear-rings in his ears. I could read it for ever. Or there is the account of Mole's journey in the Wild Wood, when all the horrors of fear assail him and he is rescued in time by the Rat and taken by him to the home of Badger. There is the episode of Mole's discovery of his old home, and Ratty's momentary harshness, followed by the decency of his sympathetic behaviour when the truth is made clear. And there is Toad's brief conversion to sorrow for his own misdeeds. He is withdrawn for reproof by Badger; his sobs are heard by the listeners; he is quite cured—Badger thinks.

'I have,' says Badger, reappearing with a limp and dejected Toad, 'his solemn promise to that effect.'

'That is very good news,' said the Mole gravely.

'Very good news indeed,' observed the Rat dubiously, 'If only—if only——'

He was looking very hard at Toad as he said this . . .

Alas, Rat's scepticism was well justified; for when asked to repeat his expression of sorrow Toad, after looking desperately this way and that, revolts.

'No!' he said, a little sullenly, but stoutly; 'I'm *not* sorry. And it wasn't folly at all! It was simply glorious!'

'What?' cried the Badger, greatly scandalized. 'You backsliding animal, didn't you tell me just now, in there——'

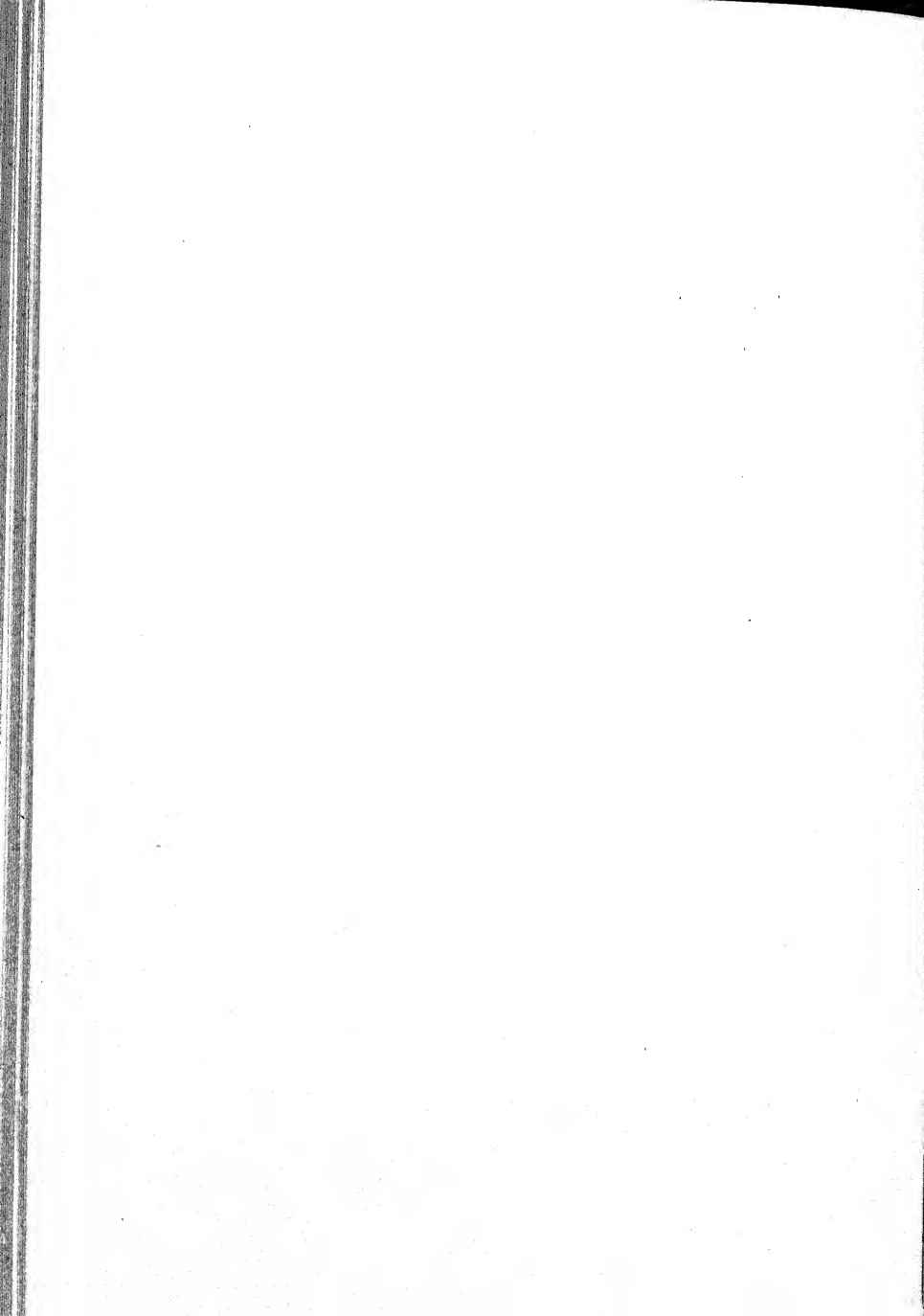
'O, yes, yes, in *there*!' said Toad impatiently. . . . 'You can do what you like with me in *there*, and you know it. But . . . I'm not a bit sorry or repentant really.'

We all know the difference between 'in *there*' and 'in *here*.'

In all of us sorrow for misdeed has given way to defiance. It is in such a passage as this, therefore, that Toad ceases to be merely Toad, and becomes epitomized human nature.

Many other passages throw equally searching light into character; still others express and fulfil our younger dreams. And, above all, the entire book is filled with the silent laughter, the gravity, and the mocking nonsense of true English humour. To read *The Wind in the Willows* is to be very profoundly amused, to have the mind set free for unlimited speculation, and to be brought, as I have said, to dreamland itself. You read a chapter, you switch off the bedside lamp, and you find yourself listening to the ripple of the river, hearing again the conversation between Toad and the washer-woman, the carol sung by the little fieldmice at Mole's front door, and the Seafaring Rat's account of halcyon nights in the Mediterranean. Gradually these sounds blend and fade. Memories blur. Still smiling, you are asleep, tranquil and content; to awaken in the morning as refreshed as you would be after a summer night in the open air. What more can a bedside book do for you than that?





## THE EVOLUTION OF THE HEROINE

THE earliest heroines in English literature were long-suffering creatures. They were subjected to constant masculine persecution, against which they had no defence except accident and unconsciousness. They never knew when a cupboard door might not burst open to reveal a malignant lover, or when a housekeeper might not have been turned by bribes into a fiend, or when the carriages in which they rode might not be waylaid as the result of some deep-laid plot against virtue. Even when they lived at home with affectionate fathers, they were always liable to peremptory betrothal to the wrong man. What a miserable outlook! I cannot believe that the eighteenth century was a very good age for women. They must have been thankful—especially the heroines—when, towards the end of it, manners improved and gentility supervened.

By the time of Jane Austen, heroines were in altogether better circumstances. They might still have to wait many years for marriage; but men had ceased to be ravening wolves. If anything, indeed, they had become too tame, or flighty, or easily discouraged, or censorious. Darcy was proud, Captain Wentworth hoity-toity, Mr. Tilney's savage father was a drawback, Edmund a sad stick, and even Mr. Knightley, much as I love him, a mentor. But at least it was then possible for a heroine to walk safely through the mud to pay a call, to discuss poetry with this man and behaviour with that, to make a fool of herself through arrogance, or be saved by nothing more violent than good principles from marriage

with a charming fellow of no principles whatever. Women still suffered from a kind of social cramp; but they were already beginning to peep about them. That was a tremendous step towards modernity.

And then there was a pause. A retrograde step. Although Sir Walter Scott dazzled the world with Diana Vernon and Jeanie Deans, and although Thackeray showed, in 'Esmond,' how fascinating a grown-up woman could be, our novelists disliked the inconveniently hoydenish. The Court, raffish enough for half-a-century, was reformed. Heroines, accordingly, became strait-laced or insipid. Swathed in petticoats, and ringed with whalebone, they ceased to be important. A few of them—not as many as is supposed—fainted. And they dropped to the rank of minor characters. That is why the only interesting women in the really popular Victorian novels were the minxes and the midwives, the oddities and the sinners. A few wild creatures from the pages of the Brontës alone kept the flag of personality flying; and these were either crazy or plain.

Now it is a curious fact that the permanently plain heroine has never been popular. An ugly duckling, yes; but an ugly woman, no. Some people will tell you that this is because most novels have been written either by men for men or by unattractive women who give their heroines a beauty treatment which they would desire for themselves. It is not true. Novels have been written by women for women since the days of Fanny Burney. They have been written for women by men since the days of Thackeray. And, with the exception of George Eliot, whose face was once described to me by a man who had known her as being like that of a horse, all the good women novelists whose portraits survive have been pleasant to look upon. No, heroines have been pretty in the past because we all prefer a pretty woman to an ugly one; and because while every male novelist prior to D. H. Lawrence was gallant every woman novelist has been

glad to do what she could for her sisters. Nowadays, with cosmetics as efficient as they are, the entire feminine sex has become almost too uniformly beautiful, and in the novel the age of heroines has sensibly increased.

But I must not anticipate. We have still to finish with the Victorian age. As I have said, the heroine was in a poor way. She had become, for the most part, merely a cypher who was married off at last to the accompaniment of Mendelssohn's music after all the really interesting people had been settled. If she showed the smallest spirit, as Trollope's Mary Thorne did, she was snubbed, confined to the house, and in the end made a heiress. Otherwise it was her ignominious fate to loiter through three volumes waiting for a husband.

And then George Meredith came to the rescue. He converted the heroine into a heroine once again, and made her a beauty and a wit. She was so graceful that she did not so much walk into a room as swim across it, a mass of exquisite furbelows. She had a good deal of manner. The very breath of poetry was upon her parted lips; she did not speak, she sang. Not since Shakespeare's Beatrice and Portia had there been such women as Diana, the Countess de Saldar de San-corvo, and Clara Middleton. What models for ambitious girls of character! And how near they came, in their superhuman way, to being flesh and blood! High-stepping, subject to passions and concealments, splendid in their high comedic raillery, and really almost fascinatingly 'not nice,' they must have stirred terrible thoughts in the minds of our ancestresses! True, the Meredithian men were their peers; but none the less the day of the insipid heroine was gone. In her place the reading public was being prepared—by the eighteen nineties was fully prepared—to put *The Woman Who Did*.

Not quite prepared until the nineties, however. For the long-suffering heroine, the Tess and the Esther Waters, and the Thyrsa of George Gissing, recalled as it were from the eighteenth century, was to have another day. Yet the day was

a day with a difference. Though she was still unfortunate, her lot was seen to be a hard one. She was proclaimed as a martyr to man's inhumanity. She was not just a heroine; she was a real person. She might be a sister to Richardson's Clarissa and the hazard-chased Pamela; but she was also our sister, offered here and now as a living sacrifice to truth. That made a considerable difference. The hard-luck heroine of the modern novelist owes much to this predecessor.

And besides this cracking and rumbling of conscience something else had begun to happen in Victorian England, of which novelists were taking note. There had been heroines who were ladies of independent means, and heroines who were poor relations, governesses, and servant girls. Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Kingsley and Disraeli had indicated that what is called the industrial revolution might produce heroines who worked at the loom. But the social history of women was continuing; and new classes were already being created in which the novelist was to find ever newer and newer heroines. There were the women with university training, who were coming back into stuffy homes and breaking down the walls of convention. They wanted lives of their own, independence, political and moral equality with men. There were the educated women who had not been to a university, but who wanted careers rather than homes in which cooking and nursing were the main details of the day. There were girls in poor families for whom teaching, baby-nursing, and domestic service were no longer the only after-school occupations; the hospital nurses, the shop-assistants, the shorthand-typists, the milliners, the dressmakers, and the waitresses. How the field for the heroine had widened! How, widening, it had created new standards of conduct for young women in print, as well as young women in real life!

It was H. G. Wells who first liberated the modern educated feminist; and *Ann Veronica*, being banned in certain places,

had the success of a prairie fire. Heroines could not be the same in future. For a time they had to be all bold and free, living for 'love and fine thinking,' and walking the earth as conscious rebels. The heroines with careers became many. The heroines who were stenographers and dressmakers and waitresses became a legion. They still married in the end, or were desperately crossed in love; but they were no longer idle, no longer condemned to receive the addresses of their employers' sons, no longer without distractions and contacts with the larger life. Some people thought the novel must be killed by so much external excitement. They thought life would be too much for it.

When the Kaiser's War came, it seemed as though these croakers must be right. Life was much too exciting to go undiluted into the pages of any novel; and dilution was the last thing wanted by a generation which had experienced the raw spirit of wartime horror. Furthermore, all women became heroines in reality, and the merely picturesque no longer had any semblance of truth. The women of wartime (it has happened again since this paper was written) accepted all the dangers of the time. While some, as of old, endured at home, others ran out to catch excitement as it came; and when, with the disillusion of peace, the pace died, they seemed to awaken from dreams, with the echoes of shouts and shrieks ringing in their ears, and the sick rocking of earthquake dizzying them still.

Heroines have been different ever since. No modern heroine could allow herself to be shocked, but many heroines have been neurasthenic, and many are ill and faulty and in a kind of terror of the world. Heroinism, which used to be confined to girls in the early twenties, continues now into old age. We have had the life-stories of innumerable women who begin as experimental children, and end as deserted and self-willed old ladies. One book I remember told the tale of a whole life in retrospect, through an old woman's bedtime

reveries. It was called *Thy Rod and Thy Staff*, and it was by a Swedish writer named Bergman; and the innocence and hallucination of some of the old woman's lonely thoughts were extraordinary. A heroine with grown-up children is not unusual. She knows much of men, and other women; she has memories and experience, sometimes a queer 'past,' and a continued capacity for passionate emotion. She looks after herself, physically, and miraculously prolongs her youth, as many a woman is doing in real life. If younger, she is susceptible to the modern drive against marriage as something essential to woman; and what was once a feminist doctrine of chastity for all is converted into a plea for unlimited experimentation. But as a rule the experimental heroine is half-hearted at her work. At bottom, if she is to retain liking and respect, she must be nice in the old sense of 'fastidious,' as well as in the sentimental sense; and she knows it. She may want to be bold; but she still needs ultimate security, and she still needs the love and respect of one member of the other sex.

Nevertheless, there is greater scope nowadays for the wicked heroine. If anybody could create a Becky Sharp, he might safely write a *Barry Lyndon* about her, without dragging in Amelia Sedley to sweeten the book, as Thackeray did in *Vanity Fair*. And Becky could accomplish all her sins without causing a furrow in the gentlest brow. A heroine may express opinions; she has a freedom of movement and morals never previously open to her. In the hands of a dexterous novelist she may be immoral, a liar, and an egoist, and nobody will object. But if that is what she is her author must not pretend that she is anything but an immoral liar; for if the heroine has modern privileges so has the reader. The reader may smile at such rogues as Julia, in Mr. Maugham's *Theatre*, and Julia, in Miss Margery Sharp's *The Nutmeg Tree*; but the reader is all the time under no illusions about Julia's suitability to a respectable *ménage*, and in the last

resort, upon a social appeal, would unhesitatingly turn both thumbs down.

That is what the contemporary heroine enjoys and suffers—the candour of the age. She has liberty; but she is subject to the eternal law of consequences. She may get drunk, she may have affairs before and after marriage, she may use bad language. But, if she does these things, in the end she throws herself into the sea, or turns over a new leaf. She either goes from drink to drugs, and so to death, or she realizes that the frantic game is not worth the moral deterioration, and calls a halt. In this respect, also, she is probably in accord with current opinion on conduct.

The old-style heroine, once she had stumbled, fell fatally into the abyss, and was lost. The modern heroine, 'tough, mighty tough in the West,' has great recuperative powers. She can pull herself together in a day, or a week. She can cut her bad companions and drop a stupid way of life. As a heroine she can do this without causing a murmur. Let her once sin against the reader's *taste*, however, and she is what she has been since novels were first written, or since marriage was first invented, a mere drab. The book containing her is ruined. We may scoff at good women as dull; but for some reason our standard of behaviour for heroines is exceptionally strict. Novelists know this. Unless they are cynics, who, after all, are only inverted sentimentalists, they share our knowledge that virtue is a rare and admirable quality in a woman. Perhaps that is why so many of them write about men, who for some reason are not called upon, in the novel, to be heroes.





## CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

PERSONALLY, I am all in favour of Christmas presents. It seems to me that they are very nearly the only remaining signs that we dwellers in the modern nightmare love one another. And when I see the thought, the anxious care, and the charming kindness that take shape in the contents of a parcel, and the delight which those contents so generously give to the recipient, I believe the world is a good place and life is worth living.

These remarks may cause you to imagine me a greedy man, counting his own parcels with a miser's eye. Nothing could be more unjust. We are, as they say, three in family; and if you visited our home on Christmas morning before we were awake (if you wished to find us still asleep you would have to come very early), you would see one colossal pile of packages, one smaller but still respectable and appetising pile, and one little almost nothing lurking under the lee of these mightier assemblies. The last, the almost nothing, is mine.

Long after I have inspected the book, the ties, the box of Carlsbad plums which our cat, Daisy Buchanan, has bought with her pocket money (her gifts are always edible), the electric torch, the slippers, and the beautiful new pipe which is the best of all, I can hear the fevered tearing of brown paper, the impatient cries, the gasps, the ecstatic squeals of the youngest member of the family, and am called upon to admire the dazzling bounty of friends and well-wishers to both my companions.

I admire with rapture. Never have I seen toys and doilies, brooches, dolls, scarves, glass boxes, 'knitwear' (horrible term!), china bowls, frocks, bed-jackets, and marrons glaces as beautiful as they are nowadays. Never have friends been kinder or more generous. Never before have I realized as I do in these hate-filled times, how the receipt of presents in flowing plenty can lift the heart and make it like a floating balloon of rapture. Indeed, indeed, I am in favour of them all.

Or no, not quite all. There are exceptions, few but vital.

I do not mean only the white elephants—Uncle James's great oil painting of a St. Bernard dog and a mackerel, or Aunt Matilda's monumental sideboard with the knobs and bow-legs—though these, obviously, present a problem. No, I mean smaller misconceptions and maladjustments of taste. Drums and trumpets, for example; concertinas, mouth-organs, and handbells. Anything that makes a noise quellable only by maddened protest. Anything that does not fit the people to whom it is given or the house in which it is expected to find a resting-place. All are exceptions.

There are others. I have a complete detestation of those implements of practical joking, the matches that will not strike, the sugar spoons that gather no sugar, the cigars that explode in the face. Certain ornaments and china dishes send one's spirits hurtling into darkness. There are indestructible monsters in wrought iron and hard wood and imitation brass, and worthless new books which have been sold cheap because at their original price nobody would have them, and mouldy Victorian relics suited only to small museums in country towns far from civilization. There are bedspreads guaranteed to produce nightmares, and majolica bowls which need large, lofty rooms for their proper oblivion. There are—but I need not continue. What I hate, other men love. Already, in the moment of enumeration, my mood of Christmas benevolence is exasperated, and I cease to feel on behalf of the receivers that gratitude which the donors, opulently giving, deserve.

Nor do I wish to speak ill of any givers whatsoever. Far from it. Taken by and large, they are the salt of the earth.

They are the salt of the earth; and far too many of them suffer from those fixed ideas to which dwellers in our age seem especially prone. They pick up some notion, and ride it to death. Dogmatically, they say: 'A present should always (or never) be useful.' 'A present should always be something the recipient would not dream of buying for himself (or herself).' 'A present should be blue, for happiness.' Or 'A present should last for ever, as a perpetual reminder of my love.'

They are quite wrong, of course. Presents are things you give to individuals, to please them. There is much more to be said, in some cases, for the gift of a piece of cheese than for a deplorable footstool that breaks one's shins or a modern painting that destroys one's eyesight. There is a whole encyclopaedia to be written in favour of the dress which a diffident young woman would have liked to buy if she had felt sure—as the giver is sure—that it would suit her, or if she had been able to spend two pounds more than her outside limit. The one quality that makes a present perfect is its appropriateness. On a desert island a piece of string might be worth more than a pearl necklace in Mayfair.

Here is a true story of a post-Christmas jumble sale. Once upon a time a white elephant or *objet d'art* which had arrived in a stocking was sent, soon after the holiday, to a sale organized for a very good object. At the pre-view, which was witnessed only by members of the Committee, this *objet* was coveted by one sharp-eyed lady. It aroused the most intense silent longing in the breast of another, who could hardly eat her dinner for thinking of it. Both ladies rose early on the morning of the sale, and hurried to secure their prize. Both found, to their horror, that, early as they were, it had disappeared. Sold. One of them, well able to afford such articles in their pristine state, was disappointed; the other, whose treasures are few and far between, was heartbroken. But

within two days the heartbroken lady had a birthday. Among her presents was the *objet d'art*.

You realize what had happened. A third member of the Committee, realizing her friend's fierce longing, and well knowing the dreadful resolve of the rival, had risen with the sun, had leapt into the saleroom on her way to work, had snaffled the *objet* before anybody else had a chance to do so, and now gave the purest joy to her friend by offering it as a gift. A lesson for us all. The giver had taken the trouble—either by thought-reading or by subtly-hidden determination at a moment of confidence—to discover what the recipient most wished to have. Her action thereafter was swift and sure. Her reward was a gratitude which I am positive will be lifelong.

The trouble she took is rarely to be endured, and if endured at all it is almost invariably endured by a woman. Men are neither easy to choose for nor ready to take trouble in choosing. In the first place they value their own secrecy, and would prefer to buy their own ugly ties and slippers according to some ridiculous ritual. In the second place they generally leave present-getting until the last minute, dash into a shop, mumble to the saleswoman, a stranger, receive her sophisticated advice, and with preoccupied frowns which are meant to show superiority to this sort of thing, carry off something which, in the event, their wives and female relations probably hate. Thanks, uttered with a sigh, are tepid. The object remains unworn or unused. The giver, who in his bones knows that he is at fault, feels remorsefully sulky; the receiver wishes she had had the money he has wasted; another speck is added to the store of arguments which show that marriage as an institution is a failure.

Not all men, of course, make such mistakes. The wise ones, who have a considerable feminine streak in them, take stealthy stock of possible needs. Months before Christmas they begin to jot down mental notes. They say: 'She

hasn't got this.' 'By Jove, that colour suits her better than any other.' 'Ah, Mrs. Swigg's bracelet made her go all goosey.' 'I wonder how she'd——' And so on. *When they are alone they look in shop-windows.* They conquer an aversion from going into these same shops and, in their own eyes, looking idiots. Having entered the shops, they listen to advice but rarely take it. And they stay in the shops as long as they think necessary, and if they do not see just what they want they come out without buying anything and go to another shop. I cannot tell you what moral courage a man needs in order to do that.

He needs courage, and he needs time; but time is always available. Most of the people who say they are 'too busy for this sort of thing' are nothing of the kind. They merely prefer to spend their time in some other way, in chatting at the club, in telling somebody else how busy they are, in watching a football match, in playing billiards. I do not object. I only say that the men who *at Christmas* give their whole attention to the job of choosing presents properly have happy homes.

Shall I tell you why this is? It is not that they love their female relations more deeply than the dashers and darters; it is that they use their imagination to put themselves in the place of each receiver of a present, 'If I were Joan or Edith, what—what above everything else—should I like at this moment to be given?' The answer comes like lightning: 'Certainly not a tobacco jar, or a card of darning wool, or a pair of blankets.' If there is another answer, a more constructive answer, you will hardly expect me to know what it is, seeing that Joan and Edith are strangers to me.

And yet, why should I not make one suggestion? Why should I not say that the art of buying a Christmas present for any woman begins with recognition of the fact that she needs *something of her very own!* It is not enough to replenish the silver canteen, or to hint at marvels with a work-basket, or chance a scarf that would suit every other woman in Chert-

sey. It is unquestionably an affront to her love to give one's wife only a cookery book or an alarm clock or a new set of aluminium saucepans. By all means give such things during the year, when the mood is upon you: they can be invaluable. Give them, even at Christmas, if they are desired. But never alone. And do not expect that, if they are found resting solitary in the Christmas stocking, they will produce an ecstasy of gratitude. They will not do so.

Yet men give their wives such things as blankets as Christmas presents. I have known it done within my own experience. And if you ask them why they behave so ridiculously they will—to a man—answer that they are at a loss to know what to give, because their wives seem to have everything they want. Everything they want! The poor saps! If they could loosen the tact-tied tongues of their wives they would hear of something to their advantage. It would terrify them. It would shrivel them. It might make them better men. It would almost certainly lead to their spending Christmas Day upon all fours in abject shame.

The truth is that no woman has ever or could ever have had everything she wants. It is not to be expected. Though all our lives are to some extent run in grooves—because far too many of us feel safer in grooves—we do not accept those grooves as a final best. Men in the past have been able to escape from them more easily than women, and they are still more fortunate than the majority of women in their opportunities for escape from routine. A woman has to live a great deal in her thoughts. And so, although she may not know what, among possessions, she has not got but must have, and may remain speechless under dreary questioning, her wishes are without limit.

She wants, in particular, a sign that her husband still thinks of her as the girl he married. She wants something that will make Christmas Day different from every other day in the year. She wants something that she has never thought of,

or something that she believes her husband has not known she has thought of. If, unpacking her parcels on Christmas morning, she finds it in his gift, memory of that radiant moment of surprised delight will carry her happily onward almost to the following Christmas. Or at any rate until her birthday.

But birthday presents, however agreeable, are not the same as Christmas presents. One is newly born every Christmas morning. I think the postmen themselves know this; for it seems to me that they never show any of the sullen indignation at overwork that most of us feel when we have an unwelcome task to perform. I have a notion that parcels must make themselves light; that they radiate the goodwill of their senders; and that some foretaste of the pleasure they are to give causes the men who bring them to our doors to disregard the labour and relish only the sweetness of the season of giving.

They must need some such kindness at Christmastide. Otherwise the burden of gifts for others would bow them down, and they might throw away a few parcels out of hatred of the lucky ones. It would never do if our heaps were to be mysteriously small, and we were to discover that the postman had decided that we had received quite enough presents for one year. He, after all, has no reindeer to whirl him through the air. He has a van or a motor-cycle; but in deep snow hilly districts are not to be reached by motor, and in many villages postmen must walk miles under abnormal loads through severe drifts.

I wonder what the effect of presents would have been upon Scrooge. I wonder whether I am right in believing that more presents are given nowadays than ever before, because friends are more closely drawn together than they have ever been. I feel sure that gratitude is more keenly felt now; and that is because, with so much that is horrifying and frightening in the over-mechanized world of today, we are so thankful to realize that old friendships have lost none of their power. We like our friends the better because of the contrast between



their stable affection and the harsh enmity which is expressed abroad towards all that we hold of value. We wish to show our liking. It is shown to us in equal measure. And the showing is done in this gracious offering of pretty and delightful things at Christmas.

How beautiful they are! What ingenuity has gone to their making, and what care to their choice! As we buy, we notice that those who sell them to us are eager for our pleasure. They are not merely polite; they are ready to enter into any difficulty that may suggest itself, and to assist in its solution. And this again is a part of the happiness bred by the season. Would that the spirit of Christmas could by some miracle be prolonged, so that it filled the earth for twelve months in every year! It would then be almost superfluous to give presents, for the millennium would have arrived.

## VISITORS

I BEGIN by remarking that the ideal visitor is one who knows exactly when to come and when to go.

To dwellers in distant climes or remote valleys any visitor whatsoever is a marvel, and an old friend is one who has dropped straight from Paradise. The exiles will drive hundreds of miles to meet him and bring him home in triumph, will slay fatted calves, produce the best that lies in the cellar, and make him feel at the moment of arrival as if he were composed of pure light. His voice will seem to them the sweetest sound on earth, his homely face will be full of beauty, and the tales he tells will have the sorcery of Othello's tales to Desdemona.

As they listen and interrupt and exult their faces will beam and their hearts brim with cordiality. They will feel as if they heard rain after months of drought, or as if the sun shone brilliantly after a dreary winter. They will gloat. They will wish it were in their power to become—of course for a reasonable period—his adoring slaves. And he, enraptured with his welcome, will be as a young girl in love, more beautiful than ever before, kinder, more and more irresistible as emotion grows, and inspired to greater triumphs of charm. He will be as happy as they; and the thought that journeys end in lovers' meetings will flicker through his mind as the greatest truth ever expressed by our greatest poet. Nevertheless, it is essential that the visitor should depart before he ceases to please, and the sooner he goes the more valuable and godlike, even to the most devoted of hosts, will be his memory.

## VISITORS

This fact is one which few of us care to understand. When we visit we are so elated by the warmth of our greeting that we sometimes lose our heads. We do not realize that the thirstiest of parched people can soon drink their fill and become indifferent to the most exquisite spring that ever splashed water upon dry tongue. And so we stay until yawns drown the smiles, until toes begin to wiggle unseen in the shoes of our hostesses, until some stealthy glance is intercepted upon its way to the clock or until by accident we discover host and hostess in frowning consultation together. Then, from tumultuous happiness, we sink at once to despair, leap to our feet, and, in a frenzy which must arouse apprehension in those we least wish to alarm, dash away at top speed from a house which has become intolerable. What! Has our coming aroused no pleasure at all? Has the delight they showed been a sham? Crash goes all our joy. Thereafter, however much we may wish to visit those friends, we shrink from doing so. In our bones, although we may complain loudly of hosts and hostesses, and say they are dull, unkind, or self-engrossed, we feel the shame of our own failure, and know that for once at least we have stayed too long.

Therefore I repeat that the ideal visitor is a person who knows by some piercing intuition, some alarm-clock of the heart, exactly when to walk into a house belonging to others, either as a most agreeable surprise or in response to invitation, and who, having briefly given his or her best, says 'Now I must go,' and goes that instant. Once she is on her feet she should not dally: it is better that she should leave her hosts unsatisfied than that she should inflict a surfeit upon them. Let the car be started, the train caught, or the front gate slammed five minutes or an hour or a week too early, rather than the same quantity of time too late. Anything is to be preferred to an inquest upon her welcome.

And yet the going must not be done too abruptly, either;

for, if it is, other misunderstandings may arise. Happy hosts are quite as sensitive as their guests; and if we are the hosts we all know that when beloved friends have hurried away they often leave behind them an extraordinarily painful sense of vacuum. We feel restless, we are cast down, as if something precious had been snatched from our hands by a too-nervous owner before we had well examined it. And although from time to time, as we recall scraps of talk or an air or a smile, we may rally, and although in still more distant recollection the visit will seem to have been all sunshine, we are left that night with a most disagreeable consciousness that besides being brief, great happiness is a little heartrending. Have we been too greedy? Has our own exuberance been too effusive? Have we driven our friends away by some inadvertent harshness of look or speech? Why have they gone so soon?

These are the morbidities of conscience. They poison the minds of all people who are liable to the extremes of confidence and despair; and I mention them only to illustrate the fact that hosts and visitors belong to the same species, the chief difference between them being geographical. On the whole, visitors may be divided into two groups—those who stay too long, and those who for some reason, which may be fidgetiness or distaste or pure tact or a natural habit of yielding to impulse, go before we have fully savoured their sweetness. If you like to say that there are, after all, two much greater divisions, of those we want to see and those we do not want to see, I shall think you very stern, but I shall not contradict you, because in a sense you and I are visiting one another, and it would never do for us to fall into argument upon such a point. Or if you prefer to divide visitors into the classes of those who *will* come and *won't* go, and those who cannot come often enough and will not stay long enough, I shall reply only that you must be naturally soft-hearted and unusually tolerant of those you do not care for. It is an excellence in you; although possibly not a sign of the wise

economy of energy. Nevertheless, while there can be no doubt that visitors whom one does not want to see are a great nuisance, I do not call these people visitors at all. They are inflictions; and if you are patient under illness you will suffer them as rheumatism or headaches.

They come, they stay—they stay, and they stay; and however soon they go they leave one worn out. They arrive, not by invitation or happy impulse, but because they are ravening wolves. They are looking for entertainment, or they want subscriptions, or we are down upon their lists for routine calls and shall have a tick subsequently placed against our names to show that the visit has been paid. Individually they would not be so bad; and they menace our quiet only by their numbers. In bulk, or one after another, they are interlopers, gate-crashers, enemies of privacy, parasites; but if we were a hundred miles from the nearest neighbour, or if when they called we too had subscription cards which we could produce with the demand for a *quid pro quo*, they might as single human beings serve useful purposes. In the desert a bore would be welcome; twenty bores would be a rescue party. Do not let us bother about them in our present security.

Let us instead ask ourselves what constitutes a good visitor. Should we agree upon a definition? I cannot say. But I suggest that a good visitor is a friend to whom we can open our hearts in simple affection without fearing that hard-eyed, summary criticism with which not very good-natured or imaginative people reward confidences. He or she must be able to laugh, to talk well, to listen very well indeed, and, while amusing us beyond the ordinary, must be able in some subtle way to radiate unpossessive but all-comprehending love. Entertaining, sympathetic, shrewd and good-tempered, he or she must above everything else be kind.

But make no mistake in the order of these qualities, or the number of them. A merely kind person is not entertaining; and a visitor, to be a real visitor, must not be soporific. He

or she must at every turn—at almost every turn—stimulate us. Therefore our friends have all, I hope, a spice of mischief in their constitutions, and perhaps a slight frost or tartness in their speech. It would never do for them to be fools or platitudinarians. They ought to be able to laugh at themselves and—if we can bear to let them do it—at us. They must command the power to sit quiet or walk or play games with equal readiness, and at games should if possible be superior to ourselves, so that we can take pleasure in unexpectedly beating them. They should have a large acquaintance, be full of news about things and people in whom we take an interest, and whether they stay an hour or a month they should never for an instant give any sign of *ennui*.

No visitor should ever look bored: the glance betraying that sin is his death-warrant. Nor should he begin to argue about politics or religion. If he has been to Russia he should mention the fact, but no more. He should not have mastered the statistics of the wool industry or stuff his talk with the abtruser terms in aesthetics or psycho-analysis. He should not feel solemn disdain of anybody who lives outside his small range of ideas. In fact he should not be solemn at all; for while a man may hold decided views he is, as a visitor, a social animal, and it is his business to contribute to the general pleasure, and not sulk in his own concerns. The moment he ceases to be agreeable he is a bore. It is a hard lesson for him to learn.

For women visitors similar conditions apply. They must be neither bored nor so appreciative of everything as to seem insincere. They must not gush or be 'modern' in their talk (for that is a sort of pose, and is not morally shocking, as they hope, but personally disagreeable, like chain-smoking or a clumsy misuse of cosmetics). They must not talk about servants, illnesses, neighbours, their children (unless amusingly), or what they have read in the newspapers. If they do not see newspapers, have no children, treat their servants well, wash

their faces with soap and water, and are never ill, they may still be extremely agreeable people, especially if in laughing at us they show that they love us. If they are quick in thought and speech and have an eye for the odd, merriment in the face of a *contretemps* and instant sympathy over a disappointment, they will beautifully lighten the burden borne at all times by their hostesses. They will be loved for their qualities, and welcome for as long as they can be persuaded to stay.

But there are visitors who have all possible visiting vices. There are some who almost equal a hostess I remember, who in greeting a guest used always to say—with disagreeable accuracy: 'You *are* a stranger. But then I know it's no pleasure to anybody to come to *my* home.' They grimace and pine over their breakfasts. They are ungracious to servants. They fuss about their clothes. They yawn. They chatter. They retail the involved stories of plays, novels and films, always forgetting to tell the most important details and patching the narrative as they go along. They smoke incessantly. They make personal remarks of an unflattering nature. Under the impression that it is a way of showing that they are quite at home, they grumble. They believe in being outspoken, for everybody else's good. They retail anecdotes which they have read in books or newspapers. They repeat stale scandal. They refer to well-known persons with whom they have no acquaintance by their Christian names. If one goes out of the room for a moment's peace, they follow, still talking. They so loiter that they delay meals, or they are so punctilious that they remark upon a moment's delay of luncheon. They pick up the knives and forks to see if they are clean, or genuine silver. They are over-familiar, or they sit upon the edges of chairs, as if to show that they will never feel at ease in any house but their own. One lady I know, who was staying with friends for an indefinite period, went so far as to put on her hat every morning, and thus gave a shocking air of impermanence to the party, which was altogether

quelled by her grisly appearance. She was determined never to relax. Or perhaps—it has just occurred to me—she carried all her jewels in her hat, as Sherlock Holmes's Dr. Watson carried his stethoscope in his topper? Whatever may have been the truth, she was a deplorable visitor. Would it not be a good notion to address all these criminals with words used by my brother as a child to an overwhelming sojourner by his bedside? 'I think you'd better go now,' he said, very politely. With increased earnestness he pleadingly added: 'And *don't* come back any more!'

As to coming back, there are incorrigible persons—their number increases with their mobility, and the car and aeroplane have much to answer for in this respect, as in others—who are always 'dropping in.' They happen to be in your neighbourhood, and although you have seen them, as it were, five minutes earlier, and have heard all their tales, they come again merely because you are a milestone upon their apparently perpetual journey from pole to pole. Residents in popular counties, such as Devon or Sussex, live, one may be sure, in constant peril of the dropper-in. They never know, as they sit down to a meal, whether the rattle of some engine may not announce the arrival of a crowd of such immigrants (for these nomads often carry whole families with them, as tramps with perambulators march from town to town with all their belongings), full of cheeriness and the undying impudence of the sponger. They can never be sure that the telephone will not ring to engage dinner, bed and breakfast for a pair of motorists barely known to them by name. I have heard of one country-dweller who was often positively besieged by droppers-in, to the numbers of forty or fifty, and who at last was driven from his home by merciless mass attacks of this description.

The attackers are to be excused; for he and his wife are particularly charming people. But you will admit the torment. To me it seems excruciating that visitors should have so



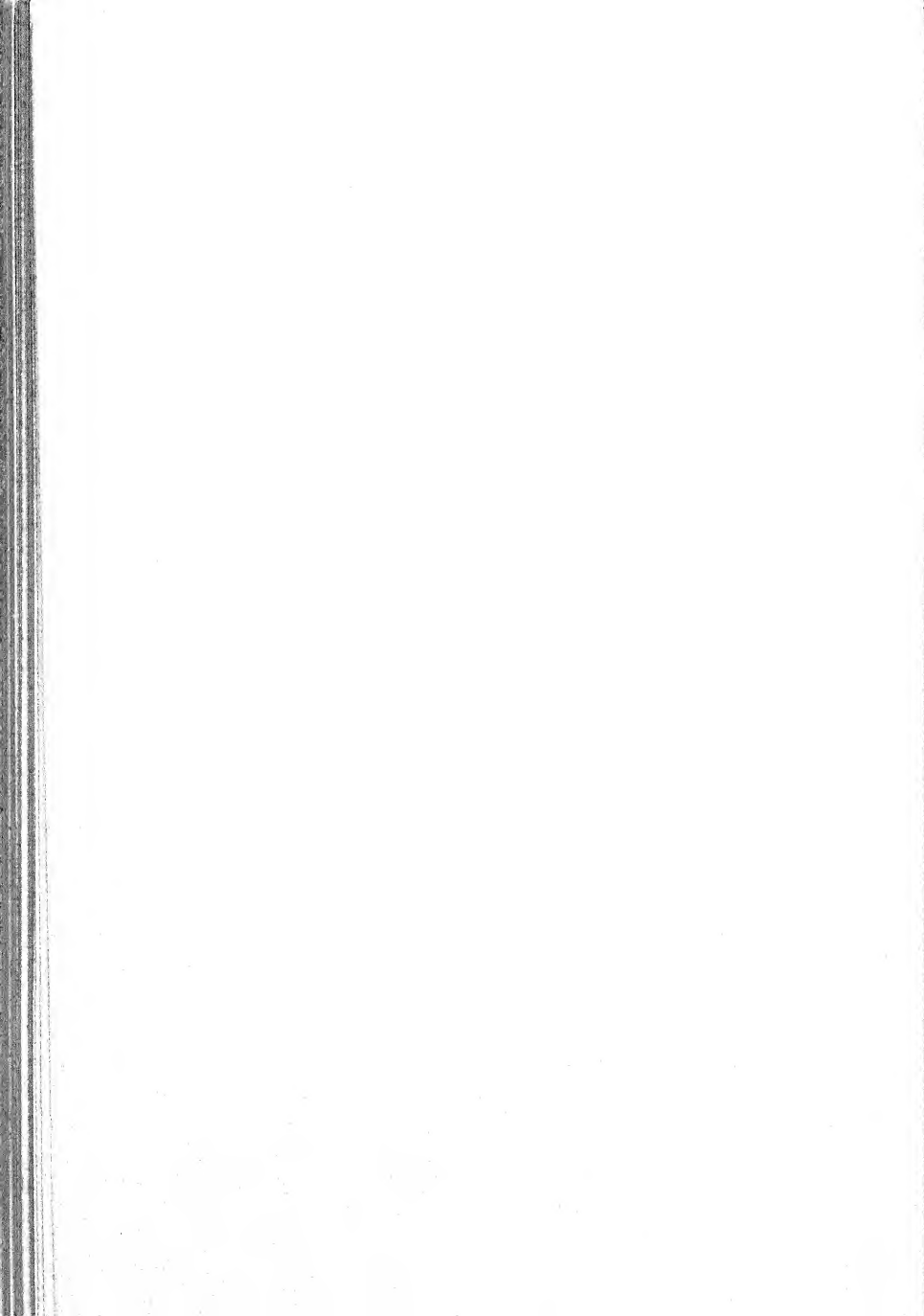
little conscience. Let us, however, not dwell upon these horrors. Let us forget them. Let us instead decide which among our friends we would rather have to stay with us to-morrow. He? She? Both? Then we are lucky, and they are a lucky pair. All? That is more difficult.

But when our truest friends arrive they will come quietly, with just enough baggage and not too much. They will find the temperature of the house as they like it, will agree about windows; will eat and drink with pleasure instead of picking a little spinach, inattentively sipping a thimbleful of hock, and declining the sweet; will go to bed when we are tired and rise just in time for breakfast at our favourite hour; and will be as happy in the morning as they are at night. They will amuse us and be amused. They will be independent but complaisant. If necessary they will be able to pass the time by themselves, or with a large party, or with us. We shall manage to hear all their exciting and revivifying news, and in return they, with the liveliest interest, will hear ours, which will seem, through their pleasure, to grow three times as desirable as we had already thought it. And when the interchange has been fully made, when everything has gone as we should most have wished it to do, and while the jubilation arising from such a feast of pleasure is still high and effervescent, our friends will quietly take their departure, leaving us stayed, nourished, and full of melancholy contentment.

Dull, do you say? Not a bit of it. These friends of ours are the salt of the earth; and as visitors they are ideal. They are as much givers when they take as when they give. For the ideal visitor is one who, besides knowing exactly when to come and when to go, knows also exactly what to do while he or she is paying a visit. Every home has its atmosphere; it is for the guest to catch that atmosphere and accept its implications. What he or she may do at his or her own house is another matter. We are speaking of visitors; and visitors, I think, owe some respect to the atmosphere of the place they are in. If it is

## VISITORS

intolerable to them, they should leave as soon as possible. And if you say that the ideal visitor, like Mrs. Harris, does not exist, I shall be inclined to think that in the past your invitations have been just a little too optimistic. In future they will be more selective, for shorter periods, and full of wisdom.



## CHRISTMAS READING

CHRISTMAS EVE! I went to the window just now, to find the night dark and windy and untempting; but indoors it is very warm, and the green-shaded table-lamp picks many glittering titles from the backs of my books. I intend, for once, to sit idly by the fire, no longer half-alert for sirens or bumps or the rattle of abominable doodles, but happy in solitude. What shall I read? Ah, that's more difficult! Long ago, I used to spend all my Christmas Eves thus, slippered, pipe-smoking, and consciously rich in the adventure of reading. The adventure, yes; for when Charles Lamb said 'I have no repugnances. Shaftesbury is not too genteel for me, nor Jonathan Wild too low; I can read anything which I call *a book*,' he took the words out of my mouth.

We may begin, as I very nearly began, with *Little Women* and *Good Wives*. They are rubbed; their covers, one blue and the other red, with silver bell-shaped flowers on them, are a trifle loose; and their pages are yellow. I open one of them, and find in what must then have been my handwriting, 'Frank A. Swinnerton, 1890,' which shows that they were given as Christmas presents when I was six years old.

As a novelist I have unsuccessfully imitated these books ever since; but nobody but myself knows, so that I have been circumstantially and impossibly charged with copying much graver models, from Flaubert to George Gissing. Do you remember the Christmas theatricals in *Little Women*? And Jo reading aloud to her unsuspecting sisters the first March story to be printed in a real newspaper? These two

passages alone would encourage young authorship. They do. They did. Indeed, Miss Alcott is such a heroine in our household that when my wife and I visited Concord some years ago we brushed aside the homes of Emerson and Hawthorne, and, in the spirit of Tennyson at Lyme Regis, said (in effect), 'Monmouth me no Monmouths! Show me the spot where Lydia Musgrove fell!'

We made straight for the Alcott house, and, as it was closed, put our eyes to the edges of the blinds to peer into one of the shrines of America. Our host, who had been a pilgrim to Stratford-on-Avon and other sanctified spots, was astounded. More, he was impressed. 'Do you mean to tell me,' he demanded, 'that Louisa Alcott is read in England?' 'Read!' said we. 'She's the foundation of English literary taste!'

What comes after Louisa Alcott? A blank period. Though my father brought home odd volumes of Stead's Penny Poets, in bright orange covers, our funds ran to nothing grander. Not until ten years later, with the *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, did my library increase. But from 1901 onwards it has magnified. Here it is, all about me; books ancient and modern side by side. On the upper shelves, which are for the small ones, they are generally old—some, such as Mrs. Behn's *Novels*, two centuries old; others reprints of the day before yesterday such as Cassell's National Library.

At threepence in paper and sixpence in cloth, these plain little volumes had the charm of cheapness. But they had also another charm; and that is why I keep them. In no other series known to me can one own Mandeville's *Travels*, *The Angel in the House*, Mrs. Piozzi's *Anecdotes of Samuel Johnson*, and Johnson's own translation of Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*.

Mention of these last two books recalls what I may call my eighteenth-century period. A publishers' clerk has to do many odd jobs; and one of mine, in the intervals of ejecting unwanted authors, was the making of an index to Boswell's *Johnson*. I was eighteen; I read Boswell for the first time;

I was completely bowled over. And, in the way of youth, I wolfed Johnson.

Many years later, driving through England by car, I stopped at Lichfield to explore the county from which Swinnertons come, and was dragged to a Johnson dinner and forced to speak. I said: 'This should not be a Johnson dinner. It should be a Boswell dinner. I am the only person present who has read the complete works of Johnson.' There was a silence of paralysed assent.

What a life-sized figure of a man Boswell gives. More completely so than his two rivals, Lockhart in the *Life of Scott*, and Trevelyan in the masterly *Life of Macaulay*. It is the figure of a wise, exasperating, rude, superstitious man, whom one can picture as one pictures Quixote or Falstaff and learn in detail as one learns an intimate friend. He gives also, which is less often remarked, the panorama of a whole era in English literature and politics.

From Richard Savage to Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox, the most eminent Georgians live again in his pages as men; and the reason for this is clear. Boswell interpreted with genius; and Johnson, who could hate writers and politicians and strangers, had too healthy an understanding to hate the human beings he knew. When asked if he had said 'I am for the King against Fox; but I am for Fox against Pitt,' he answered with really sublime simplicity: 'Yes, Sir; the King is my master; but I do not know Pitt; and Fox is my friend.' That was all. He was, for all his iconoclasm, simple and affectionate—as Arnold Bennett, who also came from Staffordshire and spoke his mind, was simple and affectionate. And he loved both literature and men. It was Johnson whose stimulation carried me from one eighteenth-century writer to another. I studded myself on Macpherson's *Ossian*. I explored the squalid venom of Junius. I gave nights and days to the study of Addison, Steele, Hawkesworth, and the other essayists. I read all the novels, from Defoe to Henry

Mackenzie; all poets, from Pope to Cowper and Young; and some philosophers, from Hume to Berkeley. But I now read, besides Boswell, only Walpole, Gray, and Cowper, as letter-writers, Pope, for his wit, Sterne, for his delicious quickness and likenesses, and Swift, whose powerful lucidity was never equalled until Bernard Shaw also became a pamphleteer. Walpole, Gray, Cowper, Pope, Boswell, Sterne, and Swift—for me—represent the eighteenth century.

Otherwise, I have moved forward, to the nineteenth, and back, to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the sixteenth English had a grandeur now lost; in the seventeenth Milton's *Comus* alone would make a century glow, and Marvell, Donne, Vaughan and Crashaw give it lustre; Congreve was the most thrillingly witty dramatist who ever lived; and if I were asked what book takes me still deeper into the heart of a man and an age than Boswell, I could only reply with the title *Pepys's Diary*. For me, Pepys is one of the eternal revelations of human nature, a golden book:

So I walked homeward and met with Mr. Spong, and he with me as far as the Old Exchange talking of many ingenuous things. . . . While we were talking came by several poor creatures carried by, by constables, for being at a conventicle. They go like lambs, without any resistance. I would to God they would either conform, or be more wise, and not be caught!

That is one of my favourite books. I read it in winter or summer. This is just as true of Boswell, or Macaulay's *Essays*, or Jane Austen's novels or Hazlitt's *Conversations of James Northcote*, which is full of social and aesthetic truth and such delightful anecdotes as that of the bad painter who, on beholding the Sistine Chapel, turned to Romney with the exclamation, 'Egad, George! We're bit!'

It was once said that the wisdom in this book was all Hazlitt's and the spitefulness Northcote's; but if that were ever true age has softened the spite and left only the wisdom.

*Northcote* is the best browsing book I know, ripe, amusing, and informative; and its criticism strikes as hard at modern affectations as it did at those of a hundred years ago.

There are plenty of other browsing books, from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* to Arnold Bennett's *Journals*; but I am always tempted by Coleridge's *Table Talk*, an extraordinary melange of politics, history, literary and Biblical criticism, metaphysics, and unexpected humour. Of the humour, I do not know which story I like best—the one in which Bowyer, the headmaster of Christ's Hospital, is prevented from thrashing Coleridge and a friend by annoyance at Mrs. Bowyer's sudden command from the doorway, 'Flog them soundly, sir, I beg,' or the one of the old clothes man who, being reproved by Coleridge for his unintelligible cry, retorted, 'Sir, I can say "old clothes" as well as you can; but if you had to say it ten times a minute for an hour together, you would say *Ogh Clo* as I do now,' or the one of the intellectual-seeming man at dinner who broke grave silence at sight of some apple dumplings with the words: 'Them's the jockies for me!' Coleridge can be a bore; but what a mind he had! It sends lightnings round and through the reader's understanding!

And then there are those grand modern books, from Dostoevsky to Tchegov; Henry James to Shaw, Wells, and Thurber; Chambers to Livingstone Lowes and Coulton, which would fill a hundred Christmas Eves, if one could count upon such numbers. True, they are for all seasons; and, so naturally, is Thomas Hardy. Yet do you remember the opening of *Under the Greenwood Tree*?

On a cold and starry Christmas-eve within living memory,  
a man was passing up a lane near Melstock Cross . . .

And then the choir:

Old William Dewy, with the violoncello, played the bass;  
his grandson Dick the treble' violin; and Reuben and Michael



Mail the tenor and second violins respectively. The singers consisted of four men and seven boys, upon whom devolved the task of carrying and attending to the lanterns, and holding the books open for the players. Directly music was the theme, old William ever and instinctively came to the front.

'Now mind, naibours,' he said, as they all went out one by one at the door, he himself holding it ajar and regarding them with a critical face as they passed, like a shepherd counting out his sheep. 'You two counter-boys, keep your ears open to Michael's fingering, and don't ye go straying into the treble part along o' Dick and his set, as ye did last year; and mind this especially when we be in "Arise, and hail!" Billy Chimlen, don't you sing quite so raving mad as you fain would; and, all o' ye, whatever ye do, keep from making a great scuffle on the ground when we go in at people's gates; but go quietly, so as to strik' up all of a sudden, like spirits.'

'Farmer Ledlow's first?'

'Farmer Ledlow's first; the rest as usual.'

'And, Voss,' said the tranter terminatively, 'you keep house here till about half-past two; then heat the metheglin and cider in the warmer you'll find turned up upon the copper; and bring it wi' the victuals to church-hatch, as th'st know.'

I find that very tempting. It reminds me of another scene of carol-singers, in *The Wind in the Willows*, where Ratty and Mole open the door of Mole's home and see 'a pretty sight and a seasonable one':

In the forecourt, lit by the dim rays of a horn lantern, some eight or ten little fieldmice stood in a semi-circle, red worsted comforters round their throats, their fore-paws thrust deep into their pockets, their feet jiggling for warmth. With bright beady eyes they glanced shyly at each other, sniggering a little, sniffing and applying coat-sleeves a good deal . . . 'Now then, one, two, three!' and forthwith their shrill little voices uprose on the air, singing one of the old-time carols that their forefathers composed in fields that were

# CHRISTMAS READING

fallow and held by frost, or when snow-bound in chimney corners, and handed down to be sung in the miry street to lamp-lit windows at Yule-time.

Tempting again. But I have something better still in view. Instead of reading any of the books I have named, I shall fill my pipe, stretch my feet to the fire, and take up, for the thirtieth, the fortieth time in a now lengthening life, the best book of all for such a night—*The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. It is by one lately much condemned in our daily press, Charles Dickens; and it is an immortal masterpiece.



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